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SELECT

CHRISTIAN AUTHORS,

WITH

INTRODUCTORY ESSAYS.

No. 5.

SCS #1453

Engd by John Scott Glasgow

JOHN WITHERSPOON D.D.

PUBLISHED BY WILLIAM COLLINS GLASGOW

TREATISES

ON

JUSTIFICATION

AND

REGENERATION.

BY

JOHN WITHERSPOON, D. D.

SOMETIME MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL AT PAISLEY, AND LATE PRESIDENT OF PRINCETON COLLEGE, NEW JERSEY.

WITH

AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY,

BY

WILLIAM WILBERFORCE, Esq.

AUTHOR OF "PRACTICAL VIEW OF CHRISTIANITY."

THIRD EDITION.

GLASGOW:

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INTRODUCTORY ESSAY.

It is a trite remark, but a remark which, from its importance, no less than from our too general disposition to forget it, we should strive to keep continually present in our remembrance, that, as every state of life, so every condition of Christianity has its own peculiar dangers. And in the one case, no less than in the other, those circumstances are not always the least favourable, which may appear so on the first view; especially to an inexperienced observer. Times of persecution press severely on the weak and timid; but experience has decisively proved, that so far from these being the circumstances from which true religion has the most to apprehend, the very contrary is undeniable. The constancy with which the victims of bigotry bore their bodily sufferings, though heightened by all the ingenious devices which the most devilish malignity could invent, and the divine support which they manifestly experienced under the severest tortures, operated more powerfully in favour of Christianity, than all the terrors of a cruel death against it; so that it even

passed into an axiom, "The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church." In seasons of persecution men are naturally driven to fundamentals. They are necessarily prompted to examine their own hearts, and to endeavour to ascertain their title to the blessed hopes and privileges of true Christians. On the other hand, in seasons of the church's external prosperity, when the profession of Christianity, so far from subjecting any one to privation or suffering, becomes creditable, and even necessary to entitle a man to a fair character in the world, there is always danger lest the regard for human estimation, which is commonly the grand governing principle of mankind, should become, in reality and at heart, the main spring also—the vital and actuating principle of the professed Christian. The danger is here the greater, from the very nature and effects of the precepts and character of Christianity. Had our divine Master required his followers to retire from the world, as some devotees have done, and to live in the solitude of the desert, or in the seclusion of a monastery; or had he prescribed to us a course of life, or the formation of a character, which must necessarily have rendered us odious and unpopular, except within our own circle, there would have been less danger of our being misled, and being seduced from our allegiance to our blessed Master, by our acceptance and credit in the world at large: but as Christianity prescribes no duties, and requires no observances, which are not compatible with the situation of every class and profession in civilized society;—nay, still more, as it expressly commands its votaries to keep the things that are

lovely, and of good report, in continual remembrance; to discharge the acknowledged duties of every station in life, with an energy proportioned to the superior force of the Christian's animating principle, a danger too naturally arises, lest we should rest satisfied with performing, in some creditable degree, the exterior duties of life, associated, perhaps, with a more than ordinary attention to the outward offices of religion. But may it not justly subject us to the charge of ingratitude, if we make such a return as this to that very kindness of our heavenly Master, which has rendered the path of duty the path also of respectability; and, instead of placing us in the trying circumstances of the first Christians, who were subjected to dishonour and evil report, as well as to still severer sufferings, has so ordered our lot, that without violating the sanctity of the Christian character, we may experience, in the estimation of others, the present fulfilment of the apostolic declaration, that "godliness has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come?"

But it is not merely by his obtaining credit with the irreligious world, that the Christian is in danger. Perhaps he has even more to dread from becoming popular among those who profess a more than ordinary respect for religion. We all, for the most part, naturally associate with those who agree with us substantially in opinion. With them we form our intimacies and our friendships—their applause is the fame we covet. In truth, to all men, the world may be said to consist of those with whom they are chiefly conversant, and whose good opinion they hold in habi-

tual regard. The world of the professing Christian, therefore, consists mainly of those whose opinions and conduct are formed on a principle of respect for the doctrines and precepts of Christianity; and he cannot but be habitually conscious that he would lose his credit with them, if he were openly, or to any great degree, to violate the proprieties of his assumed Christian character. But this habitual reference to the opinions and feelings of others, though it may sometimes supply a counteracting influence against open vice, and an additional security against the suddenness or force of temptation, especially of temptations to actual sin, is yet but too apt insensibly to become the main spring, the actuating principle of our conduct. But, alas! we may be popular among our fellow-christians from the exterior of our Christian character, while the inner man may all the time be growing weaker and weaker. The true Christian, therefore, conscious of the corruption and deceitfulness of his own heart, will be constantly on his guard against the delusion to which he knows himself to be prone. He will be afraid of having the respect and attachment of his fellow-christians chiefly at heart, while he professes to be supremely actuated by love and gratitude to his God and Saviour. He will therefore be endeavouring to fix, and habitually to maintain, in his mind, a strong impression of the nature and effects of true spiritual religion; and having ascertained, beyond dispute, his own title to that blessed character, he will strive to keep the evidences of this title to the name of Christian continually present to his view, remembering the Apostle's declara-

tion, that "as many as are LED by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."

Still farther.—It is the never-failing characteristic of true religion, to prompt its professor, in imitation of the great apostle of the Gentiles, forgetting the things that are behind, to press forward towards the prize of his high and heavenly calling; and to be continually advancing in his Christian course, and never to be satisfied with his actual attainments, but to be striving to root out every remaining corruption, and to perfect every Christian grace, that he may bring every thought and feeling into the obedience of Christ;—to live more habitually under the influence of that divine Spirit, of which Christians are said, in Scripture, to be the temples;—and to feel more constantly and more powerfully the life and force of this blessed principle. To those who are thus desirous of continually *growing in grace*, no less than to those who would guard against being fatally beguiled by the fairness and even excellence of their character, few publications are likely to be more useful than the Treatises of the late Dr. JOHN WITHERSPOON, to which I have undertaken to write an Essay. I am conscious, indeed, that the excellence of that Work is far too well established to render necessary any eulogium of mine. Nevertheless, from what cause I know not, it appears to me, of late years, scarcely to have been valued at its proper worth; still less to have been perused as generally as it deserved to be. The Author had drunk largely of that abundant stream of practical divinity, which is supplied by what I may be permitted to term the

church's well-head, the works of the ancient worthies of the English religious establishment, from the period of the Reformation, till toward the close of the 17th century, to which also many of the excellent Puritan writers copiously contributed. And while his writings contain much of that searching examination of the human heart, for which they were so distinguished, we have the same sentiments at a less expense of time and trouble; relieved not only from their prolixity, but sometimes from their obscurity, by the omission of those numerous subdivisions with which the works of our older divines so generally abound. It was the object of Dr. Witherspoon, in the present admirable Work, to trace the grand outlines of the Christian character—to lay before his readers the vital principles of real Christianity—and to point out the effects which those principles, when really in the heart, will infallibly produce. More especially he endeavoured to point out the genuine features of him whose glorious privilege it is to be renewed after the divine image, and to distinguish them from those false appearances which, however fair at first sight, possess not the substance and symmetry, the life and power of that character, which entitles its possessor to the denomination of a child of God. But in our high commendation of this excellent work, it may perhaps be necessary, in one instance, if not to withhold, at least to qualify our eulogium. In the chapter wherein the Author treats of the view which will be taken, by all true Christians, of the nature of God, it may perhaps be conceived that there may be some danger of making

sad the heart of many a truly righteous, though timid and trembling believer. It is not however that the Author is erroneous in his statement: the principles and feelings which he describes are found, *substantially*, in all real Christians. But besides that all are not able to take an accurate view of the state of their own hearts, these principles and feelings exist in very different degrees, in persons of different measures of intellect and sensibility. But in all Christians there is a hatred of sin and love of holiness; there is a genuine and deep humiliation, from a consciousness of disobedience and ingratitude towards God, which necessarily arises out of a deep sense of the infinite perfection of God, and of the moral excellence of his commandments. Thence arises that sense of our disease, as our blessed Saviour terms it, which renders the Physician so acceptable; which so endears the Saviour, not only as the atonement for our sins, and as the means of obtaining the forgiveness of them, but as the way also by which we may be delivered from their power, and be conformed to the character and image of Christ. Hence, too, we become more suitably impressed, (even *overwhelmed* would be an inadequate name for a feeling which we never can experience in a just degree,) with a sense of the unspeakable mercy and love of God. It is not merely that he pardons those who deserve punishment at his hands: but, if we may presume to use such an expression, in speaking of truths, the grandeur of which exceeds our limited faculties, He who declares himself to abhor all iniquity, has devised a plan for exercising his lenity,

without disparagement to his attribute of justice, *by the sacrifice of the only Son of his love*, the partaker of his divine nature and glory. But the mercy he showed was to be on a scale commensurate with all the circumstances which attended it. It was not merely that the criminals were to be pardoned; they were to be received into favour; into the closest and most intimate union with the infinitely holy God; they were to be purified from their corruptions; the spirit of disloyalty being rooted out, a spirit of willing and grateful obedience was to be substituted in its place: and child-like love and affiance being produced in them, they were to be regarded as the children of God, entitled to all the privileges implied in that high relation. Thus, then, is effected that mighty renovation of which our Saviour spoke to Nicodemus, by which, to use the language of Scripture, "we are made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." How forcibly we are reminded of the Scripture declarations, concerning the divine mercy, that "God's ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts; but that as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts."

But they who, in the above particular doctrine, or in any other, may not entirely agree with Dr. Witherspoon, will nevertheless find themselves able fully to adopt his practical principles; nor will his work be highly valued only by those who are already far advanced in the Christian course, but by those also, who not having yet so clearly ascertained to

themselves a claim to the character of real Christians, are nevertheless desirous of thoroughly scrutinizing their own hearts, and of comparing themselves with the finished model delineated by our Author; and, above all, by maintaining a close union with the Redeemer, from whose fulness they are to derive all spiritual blessings, of transfusing into themselves the various graces which they may here contemplate.

Again, this work is likely to be the more useful to all who are in earnest in religion, to all at least who acknowledge the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, because, besides the accurate statements it contains of the genuine principles of the Christian character, it abounds also in those urgent and powerful appeals to the consciences and feelings of men, of the usefulness of which the longer we live the more we shall become sensible. For strange as the assertion might appear, were it not clearly and indisputably established, there is no class of objects in pursuit of which we are apt to grow so lukewarm, no description of interests of which we are so little disposed to be duly watchful, as those of which we are nevertheless fully convinced in our understandings that they are of all others the moot valuable and important. Here, in truth, we discover one of the strongest proofs, and most striking illustrations of human corruption—of that moral obliquity by which we are drawn aside from the line prescribed by our clearest sense of interest, no less than by the most powerful obligations of duty.

The serious study of this little work is eminently

calculated to rouse us to a just impression of our critical and alarming circumstances, while in our probationary state. Nor will the perusal of it be less useful to those whose views of practical Christianity have hitherto been too superficial, and who, although acknowledging that the present life is but a journey, have nevertheless been accustomed practically to consider religion as chiefly conversant with the conduct of men towards their fellow-creatures. Here they will learn how defective have been their views of Christian doctrine. In no way can we take a more effectual security against sliding insensibly into these erroneous views, than by often raising our minds to the consideration of the essential dignity of the Christian character. It is thus, that the venerable Apostle, our Saviour's beloved disciple, excites the zeal and elevates the views of the Christians of his day. It was for this end that the Apostle of the Gentiles prayed for his converts, that strong as their faith and ardent as their hopes already were, they might enjoy still clearer and higher notions of the dignity of their high calling. And our blessed Lord himself, in the prayer which closed the last discourse he held with his disciples, enforced on them the ennobling consideration, that all his people were to be made partakers of a divine nature: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for all them that shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us—I in them, and thou in me." Thus is the heavenly character to be formed; thus are we to be "made meet to be

partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" on earth; and it will be the daily business of the true Christian to be rooting out every remaining trace of his natural corruptions, and perfecting the lineaments of the divine image. For this end let him often peruse the sacred volume, and more especially the Epistles of St. Paul, and the first Epistle of St. Peter and St. John, with a view to fix in his mind, and maintain in his lively recollection, a just sense of the nature and extent of spiritual religion, scrutinizing, at the same time, the state of his own tempers and affections, that he may ascertain the real state of what is styled so forcibly in Scripture, the inner man of the heart.

But it is only by accompanying our study of the Scriptures, with constant, humble, and fervent prayer, that we can hope to draw down those blessed influences which alone can enable us to feel the truths of Christianity in all their vital power, and can maintain the life of religion in the soul. Such alas! are the depraving tendencies of the moral atmosphere of this world, that Christianity itself, though heaven-descended, experiences the deteriorating effects of its corrupting qualities. It is the object of Dr. Witherspoon's excellent work to detect and extirpate some of those corruptions. May the divine blessing abundantly attend its perusal, and render it eminently successful, in vindicating the claims, and establishing the dignity of that Christianity, which alone deserves the name. May all who recognise the truth of the doctrines, and who admire the excellency of the lessons which it contains, endeavour to

let their light shine before men, and to compel them to acknowledge the superior value of true Christian principles, from the superiority of its practical effects. Herein, said our blessed Lord, is my Father glorified, "that ye bear much fruit,—so shall ye be my disciples."

W. W.

London, *March*, 1823.

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AN

ESSAY

ON THE

CONNECTION

BETWEEN THE

DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

BY THE

IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS OF CHRIST

AND

HOLINESS OF LIFE.

TO THE

REV. JAMES HERVEY.

Sir,

When Christ our Saviour was about to go to his Father, he told his disciples, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." I am persuaded that by this he did not only intend to forewarn the twelve of the offence which that generation would take at the ignominy of the cross, but also to intimate that the case would be the same in all ages; that his doctrine would meet with great resistance and opposition; and that the temper and character of his real disciples would be very different from the spirit that would generally prevail in the world. This hath been continually verified in experience. For as many in the highest stations, and of highest repute for wisdom in the world, did set themselves against the Gospel at its first publication, so even where there is a nominal profession of it, there is still an

opposition to its doctrines, in their simplicity and purity, by the world; that is to say, those who have most sway in it, who are the most passionate admirers of its fashions, and the most assiduous prosecutors of its honours and pleasures.

It may also be observed, that there is sometimes, perhaps even generally, a sovereignty of divine providence in the choice of the instruments employed in spreading the Gospel. As at first twelve illiterate fishermen were chosen, so, often since that time, the weakest and most unlikely have been pitched upon, "that our faith might not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." Hence it frequently happens, that it is not only difficult to make men believe the Gospel, but even to persuade them to hear it. They are apt to despise and deride the message, because of the meanness of the messenger, or the homeliness of the terms in which it is delivered. This is particularly the case with the present age. From a certain love of ease, and luxury of mind, they despise and trample upon all instructions which have not something pleasing and insinuating in their dress and form.

You, Sir, are one of those happy few, who have been willing to consecrate the finest natural talents to the service of Christ in the Gospel, and are not ashamed of his cross. You have been able to procure attention on some subjects, from many who would hardly have given it to any other writer. This hath made me observe, with particular attention, the effect of your last performance, Theron and Aspasio, the character given to it, and the ob-

jections raised against it. And I have always found, that the most specious and plausible objection, and that most frequently made against the doctrine of justification by imputed righteousness, has been in this case, as indeed usually before, that it loosens the obligations to practice. This is what I have particularly applied myself to refute in the following Essay, because I have rarely observed it done distinctly, and at full length, in any writer. And I have addressed it to you, as a testimony of my esteem of your excellent and useful writings, as a public declaration of my espousing the same sentiments as to the terms of our acceptance with God, and my ambition of contributing some small assistance to the support of the same glorious cause. It was also no small inducement to it, that thereby it might appear to all, that no external distinctions, or smaller differences, ought to be any hinderance to a cordial esteem and affection among the sincere servants of our common Master.

The greatest part of what follows was first delivered in two sermons, but it is now thrown into the form of an essay, lest the despised title of a sermon should offend some, and that it might the better admit of several additions, both in the body of the piece and in the notes, which could not have been so properly delivered from a pulpit. Some of these regard the philosophical principles which have of late been published among us, of which I propose, in a short time, a much fuller discussion; as there is no way in which the truths of the Gospel are more perverted, than by what the apostle Paul calls

"philosophy, and vain deceit, and oppositions of science falsely so called."

That your useful life may be prolonged, and that you may have the honour of contributing more and more to the conversion of sinners, and the edification and comfort of believers, is the earnest prayer of,

SIR,

Your most obedient humble Servant,

J. W.

AN

ESSAY

ON

JUSTIFICATION.

All the works and ways of God have something in them mysterious, above the comprehension of any finite understanding. As this is the case with his works of creation and providence, there is no reason to expect it should be otherwise in the astonishing method of the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ. From this their mysterious nature, or rather from the imperfect measure and degree in which they are revealed to us, they are admirably fitted for the trial of our ingenuity, humility, and subjection. They are all of them, when seriously and impartially inquired into, holy, just, and good; but at the same time, not beyond the cavils and objections of men of prejudiced, perverse, and corrupt minds.

The apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, among whom he had never been in person, at great length establishes the fundamental doctrine of the gospel, That sinners are justified by the free grace of God, through the imputed righteousness of a Redeemer. To this doctrine, men do by nature make

the strongest opposition, and are, with the utmost difficulty, brought to receive and apply it. We may well say of it in particular, what the same apostle says of the truths of God in general, that "the natural man doth not receive them." It is therefore highly necessary to prevent or remove, as far as possible, the objections that may be brought against it by the art or malice of Satan, who will, no doubt, bend the chief force of all his engines against this truth, knowing that the cordial reception of it is a sure and effectual, and indeed the only sure and effectual means, of destroying his power and influence in the heart. Accordingly we find the apostle, in the sixth chapter of the above-named Epistle, and first verse, supposes an objection made against this doctrine in the following terms: "What shall we say then? shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" To which he answers by rejecting the consequence with the utmost abhorrence, and in the strongest manner affirming it to be without any foundation.

From the introduction of this objection by the apostle, we may either infer that there were, even in these early days, some who branded the doctrine of redemption by the free grace of God with this odious consequence; or that he, by the inspiration of the Almighty, did foresee that there should arise, in some future periods of the Christian church, adversaries who would attempt to load it with this imputation: or that the doctrine is indeed liable, on a superficial view, to be abused to this unhappy purpose, by the deceitful hearts of men who are wedded to their lusts. It is probable that all the

three observations are just; and the two last render it a peculiarly proper subject for our attention and consideration at this time, and in this age.

It is well known that there are many enemies of this doctrine, of different characters and of different principles, who all agree in assaulting it with this objection—that it weakens the obligations to holiness of life, by making our justification before God depend entirely upon the righteousness and merit of another. And so far, I think, we must join with the adversaries of this doctrine, as to lay it down for a principle—that whatever belief or persuasion, by its native and genuine tendency, weakens the obligations to practice, must be false. And I will also assert, in opposition to some modern infidels, (though some may think that my cause might avail itself of the contrary opinion,) that a man's inward principle, or the persuasion of his mind, hath a necessary and unavoidable influence upon his practice. That is to say, so far as it can be applied to practice, and so far as it is real or prevalent above its opposite; for there are many truths of a religious nature which men think they believe sometimes, but which yet their corrupt passions often make them doubt of; and these doubts are nine parts in ten of their lives observant to their minds, as a vindication of their licentious practice. In some sense, such may be said to act in contradiction to their principles; but they are principles either not really believed, or, which is the same thing, not habitually recollected; and none can expect that men will act upon a principle, though once ever so firmly believed, if it be forgotten, or at the time of action entirely out of view. So that, if

I am not able to show that justification through the imputed righteousness of Christ, is so far from weakening the obligations to holiness, that, on the contrary, the belief and reception of it, as its necessary consequence, must make men greater lovers of purity and holiness, and fill them with a greater horror of sin than any other persuasion on the same subject, I am content to give up the cause.

I hope we may be indulged a candid hearing on this subject, as experience does not seem to be unfavourable to the doctrine I am essaying to defend. If it appeared in fact, that its friends, upon a fair and just comparison, were more loose in their practice than their adversaries of any of the opposite opinions, it would be a strong prejudice against it: or rather, if this were always the case, it would be an unquestionable evidence of its falsehood. But doth not the contrary appear on the very face of the world? Are not the persons who profess to deny their own righteousness, and hope for justification through Christ, ordinarily the most tender and fearful of sinning themselves, and the most faithful and diligent in promoting the reformation of others? And do not all careless, profane, and sensual livers, almost to a man, profess themselves enemies to this doctrine? I could almost appeal to any one who hath the least experience of, or commerce with the world, whether he would expect to find, upon a strict search and inquiry, the worship of God more constantly attended; the name of God more regularly called upon in families; children and servants more carefully instructed and more dutifully governed; a greater freedom from levity, profaneness, unchastity, pride, malice, or in-

sincerity of conversation, amongst the friends or enemies of this doctrine? So true is this, that they commonly have the appellation of the *stricter sort* given them, by which is certainly understood at least an apparent strictness of life and manners.*

As, therefore, experience doth not hinder, or rather as it warrants us to affirm, that those who expect justification by free grace are, of all others, the most holy in their lives, I propose to show that it must be so, and that this is but the native fruit, and necessary consequence of their principles. What has induced me to this attempt, is not only the calumnies of enemies, but the weakness or treachery of professed friends. These last injure the truth often in two different ways. Some speak in such a manner as to confirm and harden enemies in their opposition to it; they use such rash and incautious expressions, as do indeed justify the objection which the apostle rejects with so great abhorrence; and, in the heat of their zeal against the self-righteous legalist, seem to state themselves as enemies, in every respect, to the law of God, which is holy, just, and good. Others,

* I am not ignorant that it is the usual refuge of those who are evidently dissolute in their own lives to allege, that there is indeed an appearance of this, but that it is no more than appearance, being all hypocrisy. It would be going out of the way to enter upon a large refutation of this slander. Therefore acknowledging that, no doubt, whatever number of hypocrites there are in the world, and there are too many, they must herd amongst, or attach themselves to the society of the best part of it; I observe, that the general charge of hypocrisy is only thrown out at a venture, is a judging of the heart, and, by the very supposition, contrary to appearances, justified, for the most part, by a steady perseverance. Whereas, usually, the whole merit of those who bring the accusation, is that of being uniformly wicked, and not so much as professing what it was their indispensable duty both to have professed and practised.

on the contrary, defend it in such a manner as to destroy the doctrine itself, and give such interpretations of the word of God, as, if they were just, and known to be so, the objection would never have been made, because there would not have been so much as an occasion given to it.*

But of all the pretended Christians, one sort are worthy of the highest contempt, who, acknowledging the truth of this doctrine, call it dangerous, and are backward to teach or publish it, lest it should be abused. Would such weak, half-thinking mortals, be wiser than God? Hath he published it, and shall we throw a veil over it, to remedy the rashness of his proceeding? Do the Scriptures reveal, and are we backward to "testify the gospel of the grace of God?" All the works of God are capable of being abused; that this may be so likewise, the apostle supposes. It is, however, not the less useful or important; only let us endeavour to vindicate it from the false charge of favouring or encouraging licentiousness of life. This I would willingly do in such a manner, as to assert while I defend it; to maintain the doctrine itself, while I show not only its innocence, but its usefulness in practice.

The words of the inspired apostle are, "God forbid! how shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer

* I have often thought, that there cannot be a stronger argument that the explication commonly given by Calvinists of the passages of Scripture on this subject is just, than the apostle's supposition of an objection of this nature arising from it. For, if the explication of some others were supposed to be the obvious meaning of the text, and were substituted in its room, as all just definitions may be without inconvenience, the apostle's words, "What shall we say then? shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" would be quite unnatural and absurd.

therein ?" In which he affirms, that the grace of God abounding in the gospel, is so far from being an encouragement to sin, that it destroys the power of sin, and removes the inclination to it, so far as it prevails. The language is very strong, " We that are dead to sin."—It seems to put us in mind of the total effectual breach of relation between a dead man, and the objects with which he was formerly connected in life: they are nothing to him, nor he to them; he neither loves them, needs them, nor uses them. So, in proportion as the grace of God offered through Christ in the gospel is received and applied, sin is mortified in the heart; thus says the apostle elsewhere, " God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." This, which is indeed the language of the Scripture throughout, is not merely denying the accusation, but establishing the contrary truth, the influence of this doctrine upon purity of heart and life, which we find the apostle also asserting in the middle of his reasoning upon the point, " Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law."

In the prosecution of this subject, it will be necessary, first, in a few words, to state that doctrine against which the objection is made. It may be delivered in Scripture language, thus: " That all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God—That every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God—Therefore, by the deeds of the law, there shall be no flesh justified in his sight —But we are justified freely by his grace, through

the redemption that is in Christ Jesus—Whom God has set forth as a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness, for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God—Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? nay, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude, that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law—Moreover, the law entered, that the offence might abound; but where sin abounded, grace did much more abound; that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord."

The doctrine asserted in the above, and other passages of Scripture, may be thus paraphrased: That every intelligent creature is under an unchangeable and unalienable obligation, perfectly to obey the whole law of God: that all men proceeding from Adam by ordinary generation, are the children of polluted parents, alienated in heart from God, transgressors of his holy law, inexcusable in this transgression, and therefore exposed to the dreadful consequences of his displeasure; that it was not agreeable to the dictates of his wisdom, holiness, and justice, to forgive their sins without an atonement or satisfaction; and therefore he raised up for them a Saviour, Jesus Christ, who, as the second Adam, perfectly fulfilled the whole law, and offered himself up a sacrifice upon the cross in their stead: that this his righteousness is imputed to them, as the sole foundation of their justification in the sight of a holy God, and their reception into his favour: that the means of their being interested in this salvation,

is a deep humiliation of mind, confession of guilt and wretchedness, denial of themselves, and acceptance of pardon and peace through Christ Jesus, which they neither have contributed to the procuring, nor can contribute to the continuance of, by their own merit, but expect the renovation of their natures, to be inclined and enabled to keep the commandments of God as the work of the Spirit, and a part of the purchase of their Redeemer.*

This short account of the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's righteousness, will be further illustrated and explained in the progress of this discourse, intended to show, that in those who do cordially embrace it, the obligations to holiness are not weakened, but strengthened and comfirmed. For this purpose be pleased to attend to the following observations; in all of which I desire it may be remembered, even where not expressly mentioned, an opposition is intended between the principles and views of a believer in Christ, who rests his hope on his imputed righteousness, and those who act on any contrary principle.

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* The intelligent reader will probably perceive, that I have expressed the above doctrine in such general terms, as not distinctly to take a part in the differences that are to be found among some authors, as to the way of explaining it, and particularly as to the nature of faith. The reason of my doing so is, that I would willingly rather reconcile, than widen these differences; and because it is my firm persuasion, that however some think it justest, or wisest, or safest, to express themselves one way, and some another, yet all who have a deep and real conviction, that they are by nature in a lost state, and under the wrath of God, and that there is no salvation in any other but in Christ, are, if they understood one another at bottom, or at least in all things any way material, entirely of the same opinion. Accordingly the reader will, I hope, find that the reasoning in the following pages may easily be applied by them all without exception.

In the first place, he who expects justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ, hath the clearest and strongest conviction of the obligation of the holy law of God upon every reasonable creature, and of its extent and purity. This will appear very evidently, if we consider what it is that brings any person to a belief or relish of this doctrine. It must be a sense of sin, and fear of deserved wrath. Let us search out the cause by tracing the effects. Whence arises the fear of wrath, or apprehension of God's displeasure? Only from a conviction of guilt. And what can produce a conviction of guilt, but a sense of obligation? This is manifestly the doctrine of Scripture, which teaches us, that "by the law is the knowledge of sin,"—and that "the law is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ." Those who have none at all, or a very imperfect sense of the obligation of the divine law, will never have the least esteem of the righteousness of Christ, which atones for their transgression of it; it must appear to them to be foolishness: whereas those who have a strong conviction of the justice of the demand of the law, both esteem and use the plea of their Saviour's merit. Such also have a strong sense of the extent and purity of the law of God, as well as its obligation in general. Whilst others consider nothing as sin, but the grossest and most notorious crimes, they are deeply sensible of the alienation of their hearts from God, whom they are bound supremely to love, and to whose glory they are obliged to be habitually and universally subservient.

This conviction of the obligation of the divine law, so essentially connected with, or rather so necessarily

previous to an acceptance of the imputed righteousness of Christ, is evidently founded upon the relation of man to God, as a creature to his Creator. This relation then continues, and must continue, unchangeable; therefore the obligation founded upon it must be unalienable; and all those who have once been sensible of it, must continue to be so, unless we suppose them blinded to the knowledge of God as Creator, by the discovery of his mercy in Christ the Redeemer. But this is absurd: for the subsequent relation of a sinner to God, as forgiven and reconciled through Christ, never can take away, nay, never can alter his natural relation as a creature, nor the obligation founded on it. Neither can it be conceived as consistent with the perfections of God to abate the demands of his law; that is to say, a perfect conformity to his holy will.* Every, the least, deviation from it, by transgression or neglect of duty, must still be evil in itself, and must still be seen, and esteemed to be so by the God of truth, who cannot lie. Now, is there any thing in the gospel that hath the least tendency to lessen the sense of this obligation, after it hath been once discovered? Very far from it: on the contrary, all that Christ hath done for the salvation of sinners, as its immediate consequence, magnifies the law, and makes it honourable.

* Since mention has been made of perfect conformity to the will of God, or perfect obedience to his law, as the duty of man, which is indeed the foundation of this whole doctrine, I think it necessary to observe, that some deny this to be properly required of man as his duty in the present fallen state, because he is not able to perform it. But such do not seem to attend either to the meaning of perfect obedience, or to the nature or cause of this inability. Perfect obedience is obedience by any creature, to the

Perhaps it may be thought that the releasing a sinner from the sanction of the law, or the punishment incurred, by pardon purchased and bestowed, has this effect; and here it is, to be sure, that men, by their partial views, are apt to suppose the objection lies.

But let us only reflect, that the obligation to duty, and obedience to the Creator, hath been seen by a believer in the strongest light, and must continue to be sensible. Will he then be induced to act in the face of a perceived obligation, by an instance of unspeakable mercy? Is this reasonable to suppose? or rather, is it not self-contradictory and absurd? It is so far from being true, that this mercy disposes to obedience, as a peculiar and additional motive, as I shall afterwards show more fully in its proper place. In the mean time, it is self-evident, that it can be

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utmost extent of his natural powers. Even in a state of innocence, the holy dispositions of Adam would not have been equal in strength and activity to those of creatures of a higher rank: but surely to love God, who is infinitely amiable, with all the heart, and above all, to consecrate all his powers and faculties, without exception, and without intermission, to God's service, must be undeniably the duty of every intelligent creature. And what sort of inability are we under to pay this? Our natural faculties are surely as fit for the service of God as for any baser purpose: the inability is only moral, and lies wholly in the aversion of our hearts from such employment. Does this then take away the guilt? Must God relax his law because we are not willing to obey it? Consult even modern philosophers; and such of them as allow there is any such thing as vice, will tell you that it lies in evil or misplaced affections. Will, then, that which is ill in itself excuse its fruits in any degree from guilt or blame? The truth is, notwithstanding the loud charge of licentiousness upon the truths of the gospel, there is no other system that ever I perused, which preserves the obligation of the law of God in its strength: the most part of them, when thoroughly examined, just amount to this, that men are bound, and that it is RIGHT, and MEET, and FIT, that they should be as good and as holy as they themselves incline.

no hinderance. What leads us into error in this matter, is what happens sometimes in human affairs. In a human government, mercy, or a promise of impunity for past crimes, may enable, though even in that case not incline, a rebellious traitor to renew his wickedness. But this is a most unjust and partial view of the case, in which the very circumstance is wanting upon which the chief stress ought to be laid. Human laws reach only outward actions, because human knowledge is so imperfect that it cannot discover the disposition of the heart: and as all professions are not sincere, so kindness is often bestowed on improper objects. This kindness, however, though it may discover the impropriety, cannot cause it.

But make the similitude complete, and see how it will lead us to determine. Suppose one who hath been in rebellion, deeply and inwardly convinced of the evil of rebellion, and his obligation to submission; suppose his conviction so strong, that he confesseth the justness of the sentence condemning him to die, which is very consistent with a desire of life: will a pardon offered or intimated to such a person make him disloyal? Is this its natural, nay, is it its possible effect? If it could be supposed to have any such consequence at all, it could only be in this distant way, that pardon seems to lessen the sense of a judge's displeasure at the crime. But even this can have no place here, because sufficient care is taken to prevent any such abuse of it, by the substitution and vicarious sufferings of a Mediator.

I cannot help observing here, that the similitude above used will lead us to the discovery of one great

cause of the objection against which I am reasoning. It arises from that corruption of heart and inward opposition to the law of God in its extent and purity, which is in all men by nature, and continues in all who are not renewed in the spirit of their minds. As they have a strong tendency and inclination to transgress the law where they dare, they are ready to think, that the hopes of impunity must encourage every one to a bold violation of it. And no doubt this would be true, if there could be any real esteem or cordial acceptance of the gospel, without a previous conviction of the obligation of the law, and the guilt and demerit of every transgressor.* But supposing, what is in truth the case with every believer, that there is a real and strong conviction of the obligation of the law of God upon every rational creature, which cannot be taken away; to imagine that the mercy of God in pardoning sinners for Christ's sake will lessen or weaken the sense of this obligation, is a most manifest contradiction. On the contrary, sin must needs have received a mortal blow, the love of it must necessarily have been destroyed, before pardon in this way could be sought or obtained; so that the apostle might well say, "How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"

* But this is impossible: for though there may be some sort of fear of punishment, occasioned by displays of divine power, where there is no true humiliation of mind or genuine conviction of sin: this is but like the impatient struggles of a chained slave, instead of the willing subjection of a penitent child. There is still in all such an inward murmuring against the sentence, as that of an unjust and rigorous tyrant, and not of a righteous judge! Therefore, though such should pretend to rely on the merits of Christ for pardon and deliverance, it is plainly not from their hearts; and therefore neither to the saving of their souls, nor to the reformation of their lives.

In the second place, he who believes in Christ, and expects justification through his imputed righteousness, must have the deepest and strongest sense of the evil of sin in itself. This is in a good measure included in, or an immediate consequence of, what has been already mentioned. For the obligation of the law, as hinted above, is but very imperfect, if we consider it only as founded on the power of God, and the dependence of the creature, and not also on the holiness, justice, and goodness of the law itself. In the first sense, perhaps, it may be felt by the wicked in this world; at least, we are sure, it is felt by devils and damned spirits in a separate state. They know that they must suffer, because they will not obey. But where there is a complete sense of obligation, it implies a belief of the righteousness of the law, as well as the power of the lawgiver; of the equity, nay, the excellence of the command, as well as the severity of the sanction. All such not only believe that God will punish for sin, but that it is most just that he should do so, and that sin has richly deserved it.

It may therefore seem unnecessary to add any thing on this subject more than has been already said: but I have mentioned it by itself, because, besides that sense of the obligation and purity of the law of God, which must pave the way to a sinner's acceptance of the righteousness of Christ, there is a discovery of the evil of sin, and its abominable nature, in every part of this "mystery of godliness, God manifested in the flesh," and the truth founded upon it; so that the more these are believed, and the more they are attended to and recollected, the more must

the believer be determined to hate and abhor every wicked and false way; every new view which he takes of the gospel of his salvation, every act of trust and confidence exerted upon it, must increase his horror of sin, and excite him to fly from it.

Let us consider a little what views are presented us of the evil of sin, in the doctrine of Christ, and of him crucified. Here we see that a holy and just God would not forgive sin without an atonement. What a demonstration is this of its malignity, if carefully attended to, and kept constantly in our eye, as a part of our very idea of the divine nature! The difficulty in this case, is our partiality in our own cause; we are unwilling to think sin so very blameworthy, because this is condemning ourselves; but let us consider what views an all-wise and impartial God hath of it, and form ours upon his. And that we may not so much as once blasphemously imagine, that he also is partial on his own side, let us remember that he is the God of love, who, by this very salvation, hath magnified his love in a manner that passeth knowledge. He shows his sense of the evil of the crime, even whilst he is contriving, nay, in the very contrivance of a proper way for the criminal's escape. He is not, so to speak, setting forth the malignity of the offence, in order to justify the severity of his own vengeance, but he is exerting his amiable attribute of mercy, and yet here must the evil of sin appear.

Consider, in a particular manner, upon this subject, the dignity and glory of the person who made this atonement. The value of the purchase may be seen in the greatness of the price; the evil of sin in

the worth of the propitiation. "For we are not redeemed with corruptible things, such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot." It was no less a person than the eternal and only-begotten Son of God, who was before all worlds, the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person, who suffered in our stead. Whoever considers the frequent mention in the sacred oracles of the glory and dignity of the person of Christ, must be satisfied that it is not without design; and none can truly relish or improve these truths, but such as thence learn the evil of sin, the immenseness of that debt which required one of so great, nay, of infinite and inexhaustible riches, to be able to pay it. A creature indeed behooved to suffer; and therefore he became the Son of man, but intimately united to the Creator, God blessed for ever. It was one of the first and earliest confessions of faith, that Jesus Christ was the Son of God; and this belief must have the strongest influence in showing us the evil of sin, which none else was able to expiate.

In many passages of Scripture, God's sending his own Son into the world to save sinners, is represented as the strongest proof possible of his compassion and love. The nearness of the relation teaches us, as it were, to suppose some reluctance in bestowing him; in allusion to which there is a beautiful expression of the apostle Paul, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" The very same thing shows, with equal clearness, his abhorrence of sin. However strongly disposed to

save sinners, he would have sin to be expiated though his own Son should be the victim: if any thing could have made him dispense with it, this should surely have had the effect: and therefore the condemning of sin seems to have been as much in view as the salvation of the sinner.

Every light in which we can view this subject, contributes to set before us the evil of sin. I shall only mention further, the greatness and severity of the sufferings of our Redeemer, as they are represented both prophetically, to show how much was exacted, and historically, to show what was paid. As the whole of his life was to be a state of humiliation and sorrow, it is said, "As many were astonished at thee: his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form than the sons of men." Again, "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him: he was despised, and we esteemed him not." Once more, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." In the history of his life in the New Testament, we see all this verified, in the meanness of his birth, and the continued insults and reproaches thrown upon him during the course of his life. There is one remarkable passage, John viii. 57—"Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?" The meaning of this is hardly obvious, unless we suppose that his natural beauty and bloom was so wasted and decayed by sorrow, that he seemed to strangers near twenty years older than he really was.

In the close of the gospel, we have an account of the last scene of his sufferings in the garden and on the cross. "He was sore amazed and very heavy. His soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death. His sweat was as it were great drops of blood, falling down to the ground." He was at last stretched on an accursed tree, where the pain of a tortured body was but small to the anguish of an overwhelmed spirit, which constrained him to utter this heavy complaint, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Let the Christian stand at the foot of the cross, and there see the evil of sin, which required so costly an expiation. Let him there see the holiness and justice of God in its punishment. Let him hear the Most High saying, "Awake, O sword, against the man who is my fellow." And let him thence learn, how much sin is the object of divine detestation.

Hath a believer then, a firm persuasion of all these truths? Are they the frequent theme of his meditations? And must they not necessarily fill him with an abhorrence of sin, inflame him with a hatred of it, and excite in him a self-loathing on its account? Thus it is said in the prophetic writings, "They shall look on me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born." And must not a repetition of the same views still strengthen the impression; so that, as the apostle Paul tells us of himself, "the world will be crucified unto him, and he unto the world."

I am sensible that these things will have no such

effect upon the enemies of the gospel who disbelieve them, or upon those Christians, if they deserve the name, who disguise, explain away, or give up the satisfaction of Christ; or even those who have a strong tincture of a legal spirit, and are for contributing somewhat toward their acceptance with God, by their own merit and defective obedience. Such cannot relish these sentiments, and therefore it may seem improper, in reasoning against enemies, to bring them at all in view. But let it be remembered, that however little many believe such things, they may yet perceive, if they will attend to it, their natural operation upon those who do believe them. And let any modern adept in the science of morals show, in his account of the foundation of morality and the nature of obligation, any thing that hath a force or influence equal to this: or, will the nominal self-righteous Christian, who thinks Christ only made up some little wants which he finds in himself, or that his death had only some general expediency in it, ever be equally tender in his practice with him, who sees so much of the purity of the law of God, and his detestation of sin, as to esteem all his own righteousness but as filthy rags, and founds his hope of acceptance wholly upon the perfect righteousness of his Redeemer?

In the third place, He who expects justification only through the imputed righteousness of Christ, has the most awful views of the danger of sin. He not only sees the obligation and purity of the law, but the severity of its sanction. It is a fear of wrath from the avenger of blood, that persuades him to fly to the city of refuge. And if we compare the sen-

timents of others with his, either the generality of a careless and blinded world, or those who act upon contrary principles, and a different system from that which we are now defending, we shall find, that not one of them hath such apprehensions of the wrath and vengeance of God, due on the account of sin, as the convinced sinner who flies to the propitiation of Christ for deliverance and rescue.

I am very sensible that many readers will be ready to challenge this argument, as pressed into the service, and wholly improper upon my scheme. They will suppose that every believer, in consequence of his faith in Christ, is screened from the penalty of the law, and sheltered from the stroke of divine justice: he is therefore no more under this fear; and its being no more a motive of action in the future part of his conduct, is the very ground of the objection I am attempting to remove. This is no doubt plausible; but let it be remembered in what way it is that believers are freed from their apprehensions of the wrath of God—it is by their acceptance of his mercy through faith in Christ. Before the application of this remedy, they saw themselves the children of wrath and heirs of hell; and they still believe that every sin deserves the wrath of God, both in this life and that which is to come. Will they therefore re-incur the danger from which they have so lately escaped, and of which they had so terrible a view? Will they do so voluntarily, even although they know the remedy to be still at hand, still ready to be applied, and certainly effectual? Suppose any person had been upon the very point of perishing in a violent and rapid stream, and saved when his strength was well nigh exhausted, by

the happy intervention of a tender-hearted passenger, would he voluntarily plunge himself again into the flood, even although he knew his deliverer were standing by, ready for his relief? The supposition is quite unnatural; and it is equally so to imagine, that one saved from divine wrath will immediately repeat the provocation, even whilst he trembles at the thoughts of the misery of that state from which he had been so lately delivered.

Let us only consider the strong sense which a believer usually shows of the danger of others in an unconverted state, from a persuasion of their being under the wrath of God. He warns them, entreats them, pities them, and prays for them. He would not exchange with any one of them, a prison for a palace, or a scaffold for a throne. How then should he be supposed to follow them in their practice, and thereby to return to their state?

But perhaps here again it will be urged, that this is improper; because, according to the principles of the assertors of imputed righteousness, a believer being once in a justified state cannot fall from grace, and therefore his sins do not deserve wrath; and he himself must have, from this persuasion, a strong confidence that, be they what they will, they cannot have such an effect: and accordingly some have expressly affirmed, that the future sins of the elect are forgiven, as well as their past, at their conversion; nay, some, that they are justified from all eternity, that God doth not see sin in a believer, that his afflictions are not punishments, and other things of the like nature. Now, though I must confess I look upon these expressions, and many more to be found

in certain writers, whatever glosses they may put upon them, as unguarded and anti-scriptural, yet not to enter into the controversy at all, I suppose it will be acknowledged by all without exception, that a believer's security, and the impossibility of his falling from grace, is a security of not sinning, that is, of not being under the dominion of sin, as much as, or rather in order to his security, of deliverance from the wrath of God. His pardon is sure, but this security is only hypothetical, because his faith and holiness are secured by the promise of God; so that, to suppose a person to sin without restraint, by means of this persuasion, that his salvation is secured by his first acceptance of Christ, is a supposition self-contradictory. However strongly any man may assert that a believer's salvation is secure, he will not scruple at the same time to acknowledge, that if such believer should sin wilfully and habitually, and continue to do so, he would be damned; but he will deny that any such case ever did, or ever can possibly happen.*

The objection must surely appear strongest upon the principles of those who make the nature of faith to consist in a belief that Christ died for themselves in particular, or of their own personal interest in him, and the pardon and life which he hath purchased,

* Indeed there can be nothing more unfair, than to take one part of a man's belief, and thence argue against another part, upon which the first is expressly founded. If I should say, I am confident I shall never be drowned in a certain river, because I am resolved never to cross it at all, would it not be absurd to reason thus—Here is a man who hath a persuasion he will never be drowned in this river, therefore he will be surely very headstrong and foolhardy in fording it when it overflows its banks, which is contrary to the very foundation of my security?

making assurance essential to its daily exercise. Yet even these will not deny, that their faith is not always equally strong, and that their assurance is sometimes interrupted with doubts and fears. Now, what is the cause of these doubts and this uncertainty? Is it not always sin, more directly or by consequence? So that sin renders their faith doubtful, which is the very same thing with putting them in fear concerning their future state. Indeed it is not more sure that our Redeemer invites all weary, heavy-laden sinners to come unto him that they may find rest, than it is that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God. So that every instance of voluntary sin must throw back the believer (at least as to his own sentiments) into his former state, till he be again restored by faith and repentance.

From this I think it evidently appears, that the motive of the danger of sin is not weakened, but hath its full force upon those who expect justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ. And if it is not weakened, it must be strengthened by this persuasion, since, as I have shown above, none have so deep a sense of the obligation of the law, and the evil of sin, and by consequence, none can have so great a fear of its awful sanction. That this is agreeable to Scripture might be shown at great length, where the putting their right to the favour of God and eternal life more and more beyond all doubt and question, is recommended to believers as an object of their care and diligence. Thus says the apostle to the Hebrews, "And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end." And the apostle

Peter, after a long enumeration of the graces of the Christian life, says, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure." Nay, the fear of wrath and of finally perishing, is represented by the apostle Paul himself, as one view at least, which habitually influenced his own conduct: "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away."

In the fourth place, Those who expect justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ, have the highest sense of the purity and holiness of the divine nature; and therefore must be under an habitual conviction of the necessity of purity, in order to fit them for his presence and enjoyment. If this doctrine, in its main design, or by any of its essential parts, had a tendency to represent God (I will not say as delighting in sin, but) as easy to be pacified towards it, passing it by with little notice, and punishing it but very slightly, there might be some pretence for drawing the conclusion complained of from it. For I think it may be allowed as a maxim, that as is the God, so are his worshippers, if they serve him in earnest. Whatever views they have of the object of their esteem and worship, they will endeavour to form themselves to the same character. But if, on the contrary, this doctrine preserves the purity of God entire; nay, if it gives us still more strong, awful, and striking views of it, it can never encourage such as believe it in the practice of sin.

But that this is the case with all such as believe and understand the doctrine of justification by the

imputed righteousness of Christ, may be demonstrated in the clearest manner. It might indeed be shown, from a great variety of arguments founded upon the mediation of Christ: at present I shall mention but two, the propriety of which, and their relation to the subject in hand, every one must immediately perceive. In the first place, That Christ behooved to suffer by divine appointment for the expiation of sin, is not only equal with, but stronger than all other evidences of the purity of God and his abhorrence of sin. It is an event of the most striking and astonishing nature, every reflection upon which overwhelms the mind, that the eternal and only begotten Son of God should assume the likeness of sinful flesh, and stand in the room of sinners: even though the merited punishment had been inflicted upon the offenders themselves, it would not have been such a proof of the purity of God. Here, even when he is inclined to mercy, its exercise is obstructed till justice is satisfied. Can any one consider this without being deeply convinced, that he is a God "of purer eyes than to behold iniquity," and with whom unrighteousness can have no communion? Will any, after such views, hope for his favour while they retain the love of sin, or expect to dwell in his presence while they continue stained with its pollution?

The same thing must also carry convincing evidence with it, that to suppose Christ to have bought an impunity for sinners, and procured them a license to offend, is self-contradictory, and altogether inconsistent with the wisdom and uniformity of the divine government; that he never could hate sin so much before, and love it after the sufferings of Christ; that

he could not find it necessary to punish it so severely in the surety, and yet afterwards love and bear with it in those for whom that surety satisfied. Not only may this be clearly established by reason and argument, but it must be immediately felt by every one who sees the necessity of the atonement of their Redeemer. They will be so far from taking a liberty to sin, that, on the contrary, they will be ready to cry out, "Who can stand before this holy Lord God?"* Accordingly we shall find in experience, that none are more ready to call in question the integrity of their own character, none more ready to fear the effects of the sins that cleave to them, as unfitting them for the divine presence, than such as trust solely in the merits of Christ for their acceptance with God.

The second thing I proposed to mention in the doctrine of Christ's mediation, which shows the purity of the divine nature, is our continued approach to God by him as an intercessor and advocate. It contributes to keep continually upon our minds a sense of the divine holiness and purity, and of our own unworthiness, that we are not permitted to ap-

* It is a certain fact, that the number of persons under distress of mind, by perplexing doubts or anxious fears concerning their future state, is incomparably greater amongst the friends than the enemies of this doctrine. By this I do not at all mean, that either their doubts are dutiful or their fears desirable. Such a state is to be looked upon as the fruit of their own weakness and imperfection, and as a chastisement from a wise and gracious God, either more immediately for correcting their sins, or for the trial, illustration, and perfecting of their grace and virtue; but its being more common among those who believe in Christ's imputed righteousness than others, is a plain proof that this doctrine doth not naturally tend to inspire any with an unholy boldness, or a secure and slothful presumption.

proach him but by the intercession of another. Such a conduct in human affairs, properly serves to show dignity and greatness on the one part, distance and unworthiness on the other. The same conduct then in God towards us, doth it not convince us, that he must be sanctified of all them that draw near to him? And whilst it makes imputed righteousness the condition, plainly shows the necessity of inherent holiness, as a qualification in our approaches to his throne. Suppose an earthly prince were to be addressed by two different persons, one who thought he had a title upon his own merit to make an immediate application, and another who could not approach him without one nearly related to him, and in high favour at court, to procure his admission, and to back his request; which of these would probably be most respectful to his sovereign, and most solicitous to avoid giving offence by his conduct? Surely the latter: and so it is always with the humble, mortified believer, who "counts all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ."

In the fifth place, Those who expect justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ, must be induced to obedience, in the strongest manner, by the liberal and ingenuous motive of gratitude and thankfulness to God. That it is the native and genuine expression of gratitude to God, to live a pure and holy life, I suppose will hardly be denied; at least, this the Scriptures represent as pleasing him, serving him, doing his will, honouring him. It is indeed extremely difficult to conceive how God, all-mighty and all-sufficient, should be at all affected with our conduct, either good or bad; it seems to be impro-

per to say, that he can be pleased or displeased with our actions, or that he hath any interest at stake. Nothing, to be sure, can be more weak and impotent, than the injuries offered, or the assaults made upon him by created beings. As his nature is without variableness or shadow of turning, so his happiness is such as can neither be increased nor impaired. And yet, in this way, he himself has taught us to conceive of the matter, that holiness is not only an imitation of his character, but obedience to his will; and its contrary a transgression of his law. These have been the sentiments of all nations without exception; and, after the utmost efforts we can make to exempt him in our minds from all human passions or affections, of joy, anger, or displeasure, we cannot help considering it still as proper to say, such a course of life is agreeable, and such another is displeasing to God, and will provoke his wrath.

Is not gratitude, then, a principle of action that will be powerful and operative? Mankind in general bear witness to this, as they have agreed in all ages to brand ingratitude with the blackest mark of infamy, and to reckon it among the most atrocious of crimes. And indeed we find by experience, that it is comparatively stronger, for the most part, than the opposite motives of force or fear. There is a sort of natural tendency in man to resist violence and refuse submission to authority; whilst they may be won by favours, and melted to thankfulness and gratitude by kindness and love: at least, this may be applied perfectly to the present case, where the bare outward performance (which may indeed be the effect of fear) will not be accepted without the in-

clination of the will. A slavish dread both lessens the degree and debases the nature of that obedience we might essay to perform. This is a universal principle; and, in particular, while the law of God stands in its force and rigour, as a covenant of works, threatening death without hope of mercy against every transgression, it begets a despondent sloth, and at best serves only to discover our sin and misery: nay, as the apostle Paul strongly and justly reasons, it renders our corrupt affections more inflamed and violent by restraint: "Nay, I had not known sin but by the law; for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet," &c.

But let us now complete this argument, by showing that a believer in Christ is under the strongest obligations, from gratitude, to do the will of God. And how many considerations concur in showing this? The unspeakable greatness of the blessings he receives, no less than deliverance from everlasting misery and anguish, and a right to everlasting glory and happiness. The infinite and affecting condescension of the great and glorious Giver, who, in mercy to those who could not profit him at all, but on the contrary had highly provoked him, laid help for them upon one who is mighty to save. The astonishing means employed in this design, namely, God's not sparing even "his own Son, but delivering him up for us all." Well might the apostle John say, "God *so* loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." But, above all, the sense which he himself hath of his misery and wretchedness. Nothing can be more

dreadful than the apprehensions which a convinced sinner hath of his own state; what, and how strong then must his sense of gratitude be to him who hath given his Son, and to him who has given himself for the purchase of his pardon? With what earnestness will he seek after, and with what cheerfulness will he embrace every opportunity of testifying his thankfulness? Will not the name of his Redeemer be precious, even "as ointment poured forth?" his laws delightful to him, and his honour dear?

It is proper to observe here, that the single view of the blessings of divine goodness, which must have the strongest influence in leading us to a grateful resentment of them, is peculiar to such as expect justification through the imputed righteousness of Christ; namely, their being of free unmerited grace and mercy. For, though there are classes of Christians who pretend to disclaim the belief of any merit in man, it would be no difficult matter to show, that there are none who do not, by their professed principles, or their usual language, suppose it, excepting those described in the beginning of this discourse. And such not only believe his mercy to be unmerited, but that they have justly deserved his wrath and indignation, nay, and that they continually do so, even in their best state; their purest and holiest actions having such sins attending them, or such a mixture and alloy of unholiness and impurity in them, as, if they were weighed in the exact balance of justness, would be sufficient to procure their total rejection.

In how strong a light is this represented by the sacred writers; and how powerful does its operation

appear to be upon themselves! They seem penetrated and possessed with a sense of the love of Christ, and of God in him, as having sinners for its object. Thus the apostle Paul reasons: "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet, peradventure, for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." And again, "If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." What a sense of the love of Christ is discovered by the two following passages of the same apostle! "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." The other is, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be *anathema maranatha;*" than which nothing could more strongly express his own sense of the obligation. It deserves notice also, that the inspired writers do often represent it as one of the strongest arguments against sin, that it is a reproach and dishonour brought upon our Redeemer and Lord. "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you, even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ. Seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."

I must again here, as on a former branch of the subject, observe, That, no doubt, such arguments as these will have little or no effect upon those who have but an imperfect belief of them, which, it is to

be feared, is the case with not a few who go under the name of Christian. But is it not very evident, that they must have the strongest imaginable influence upon all such as are actuated by a lively faith in the doctrine of redemption? They must see themselves indebted to the undeserved mercy and love of God for favours of infinite value, and therefore must certainly endeavour to express their gratitude by an entire consecration of their lives to their benefactor's service.

This leads me to observe, in the sixth and last place, That those who expect justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ, must be possessed of a supreme or superlative love to God, which is not only the source and principle, but the very sum and substance, nay, the perfection of holiness. That those who believe in, and hope to be accepted and finally saved, through the imputed righteousness of Christ, must be possessed of a supreme love to God, appears from what hath been already said upon the subject of gratitude. Love is the most powerful means of begetting love. Thus says the apostle John, "We have known and believed the love that God hath to us; God is love." And a little after, "We love him because he first loved us." The infinite and unspeakable mercies which he hath bestowed on us, with all the circumstances attending them, the means and manner of their conveyance, which have been hinted at above, must necessarily excite the most ardent love in return, and every proper expression of it. This is their immediate and natural, nay, this is their necessary and unavoidable effect. "For the love of Christ constraineth us,

because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again."

If any shall think proper to assert, that favours bestowed are not to be considered as the true and formal causes of love, but the excellence and amiable qualities of the object—thus, for example, supposing any person of a character justly hateful in itself, from caprice, self-interest, or any other sinister motive, to bestow many signal favours upon another, the beneficiary might receive and delight in the favours without esteeming, nay, even when he could not esteem the giver: if this is considered as an objection against what I have just now said, and the conclusiveness of the argument to be founded upon it, I offer the two following answers to it:—

1st, That in the account given in Scripture of the redemption of the world by the substitution of a Saviour, and the justification of sinners by the imputed righteousness of Christ, there is the brightest display of all the divine perfections. The almighty power, the unsearchable wisdom, the boundless goodness, the inflexible justice, and inviolable truth of God, shine in this great design with united splendour. Every attribute that can in reason claim our veneration and esteem, as well as our thankfulness and gratitude, is here to be seen. Even the perfections of justice and mercy, (which I will not call jarring attributes, as some too harshly do, but) which seem to restrain and limit each other in their exercise, are jointly illustrated, and shine more brightly by their union, than they could have done sepa-

rately; and, at the same time, the purity and holiness of the divine nature, which is the sum of them all, is deeply impressed upon the mind. So that here is every thing that can produce love; worth and excellence to merit it, love and kindness to excite and raise it. From this it evidently appears, that he who believes in the imputed righteousness of Christ, must have a superlative love of God.

But, 2dly, Lest it should be said that many have not this view of the doctrine in question, as honourable to God, and representing him in an amiable light, but the contrary; I observe, that there must have been a discovery of the glory of God, as shining in this plan of salvation, to all who cordially embrace it. Nothing else could induce them to do so. If its enemies do not see this, and therefore set themselves against it; this confirms the different and honourable sentiments entertained by its friends: so that even supposing (what we will never grant) that this view of the amiableness of the divine nature, as represented in the gospel, were not well founded; yet, doubtless, it is the view of those "who count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ," and glory in nothing but his cross.

The truth is, notwithstanding any cavilling objections that may be raised against it, many favours received by one to whom they are absolutely necessary, and by whom they are infinitely prized, must naturally and necessarily produce love. This will be reckoned a first principle by every unprejudiced mind; and it is always supposed in the Holy Scriptures, where the saints are represented as under the habitual and powerful impression of love to God, for

his love to them manifested in their redemption. Thus says the apostle Paul—" For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Now, is there any thing more necessary to show, that those who believe and trust in the imputed righteousness of Christ must be holy in their lives, than their being under the influence of a supreme love to God? Is not this the first and great commandment of the law, " Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind?" Is not this a never-failing source of universal obedience? As they love God, will they not love their brethren also: the very worst of men, because they are the creatures of God? and the righteous more especially, because they are his saints, his chosen ones? Can they love God supremely, and yet voluntarily displease him, breaking his commandments, or resisting his designs? We know that love hath a quite different effect in every other and inferior instance, endearing to us every thing related to the person who possesses our esteem and affection; how then can it be supposed so preposterous in this single case, when it is fixed on the greatest and the best of objects?

It is a received maxim, that there can be no true love where there is not some likeness and conformity of nature and disposition to the object beloved, and an endeavour after more. And this is a maxim that will in no case hold more infallibly than in moral

subjects. It is impossible that we can love purity, if ourselves are impure; nay, it is even impossible that we can understand it. Though an unholy person may have a very penetrating genius and capacity, may think acutely, and perhaps reason justly upon many, or most of the natural attributes of God, he can neither perceive nor admire his moral excellence. Instead of perceiving the glory of God as infinitely holy, he hates, and sets himself to oppose this part of his character, or to substitute something quite different in its room.* Or, if we can suppose him able, or from any particular reason inclined, to tell the truth, as to what God is, he can never discern or feel his glory or beauty in being such. For why? he himself is unholy; that is to say, in other words, he supremely loves, and hath his affections habitually fixed, upon something that is not God, something that is contrary to God's nature, and a breach of his law.

Let us continue to reflect a few moments upon this subject, which is of great importance, varying a little the light in which it is viewed. Let us consider what is meant by a supreme and superlative

* This is the true reason why many so warmly oppose God's vindictive justice, and that in the face of many awful examples of it, even in the present partial and imperfect dispensation. That there are many marks of God's displeasure against sin, even in that part of his government which is at present subjected to our view, and also distinct warnings of a stricter reckoning to come, I should think might be, to an impartial person, past all doubt; and yet this is derided, and denied by many, merely because they can never think that a perfection in the divine nature, for which they have no love or esteem in their own hearts. All who love God, then, must be like him; and even those who will not be what he really is, are always strongly inclined, at least, to suppose him what they themselves are.

love to God. These words must have a meaning. It is not a supreme love of a certain nature, or person, called God, whom no man hath seen, and of whom we know no more but the name. In this case the old maxim would hold, *Ignoti nulla cupido;* there can be no affection, of either love or hatred, towards an object wholly unknown. A supreme love of God therefore, where it really hath place in any heart, must mean the love of a character in some measure understood, though not fully comprehended. In short, according to the Scriptures, it is a supreme love of the source and pattern of moral excellence, of a being of infinite holiness and purity, with whom "evil cannot dwell." Is not this, in truth and reality, the love of holiness itself, the supreme love of it? Can we love holiness then, and not aspire after it? can we love it, and not endeavour to practise it? nay, can we love it, and not possess it? can we love holiness supremely, and live in sin habitually? It is the grossest contradiction, the most absolute impossibility. There is then a diametrical opposition between the love of God and the service of sin. To suppose them consistent, would be supposing that the tendency of the heart and affections might be opposite to the course of the life, or supremely fixed upon two things mutually destructive to each other: on the contrary, our Saviour justly affirms, that "no man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

Once more, Is not the love of God, I mean the supreme love of God, precisely what is meant by

holiness? It is not only an evidence of it, not only a source of it, not only an important branch, but the sum and perfection of it. For what is sin in the heart, of which all evil actions are but the fruits and expressions, and from which they derive their malignity and contrariety to the divine will? Is it not the love and pursuit of inferior objects on their own account, and giving them that place in our affections which is due only to God? All sins, of whatever kind, may be easily reduced to this, and shown to be nothing else but the alienation and estrangement of our heart and affections from God, to whom alone they are due: which, so far as it prevails, necessarily occasions a misapplication of every faculty of our minds, and of every member of our bodies, and thus a rebellion of the whole man. But whoever loves God above all, and places his chief happiness and delight in him, is truly holy; not only will be so, as the effect, but really is so, by the possession of this disposition. In proportion as this love is increased and strengthened, his sanctification is carried on; and when it is complete and triumphant, entirely free from the mixture of any baser passion, he is perfect in holiness.

It may probably occur to some readers, that this reasoning will not accord with the accounts given by many moderns of the nature and foundation of virtue. Some found it upon the present prevailing tendency of our own dispositions, and make it point directly and immediately at our own happiness: others found it upon our connections with our fellow-creatures in this state, and make it consist in benevolence of heart, and beneficence of action: others again, who approach

nearer the truth, but without precision, style it an acting towards every object, according to reason and the nature of things. Upon any of these schemes, the connection, or rather coincidence, above alleged, between the love of God and virtue, or moral excellence, does not so clearly appear. This indeed seems to me the great defect of these accounts of the nature and foundation of virtue, that they keep our relation and obligations to God at a distance at least, and much out of view. But as this is the first commandment of the law which God hath revealed to man for his obedience, "Thou shalt love the Lord with all thy heart, with all thy strength, and with all thy mind;" so, upon a fair and just examination, the supreme love of God will be found the most consistent and rational account of the nature of virtue, and the true source from which all other virtues, that are not spurious, must take their rise, and from which they derive their force and obligation. It is founded, not only upon the relation of creatures to their Creator, but on the inherent excellence of the divine nature. For supposing (what will scarcely be denied) that God may be at all the object of our esteem and love, it is plain that we ought to have the highest esteem for the highest excellence, a supreme love for what is infinitely amiable; and if our affections do in any measure prefer what is less to what is more worthy, they must be, in that proportion, wrong and misplaced.

As to some of the phrases (for they are no more) which come into repute together, or in succession one after another, to express the rise and foundation of virtue, such as a sense of beauty, of harmony, of

order, and proportion, this is no explication of the matter at all; it is only transferring the language used with respect to sensible objects, to ethics or morality, in which it must be understood figuratively. That there is some analogy between those subjects and morality, may be easily confessed; but there are few different subjects in nature, between which as strong, or a stronger analogy may not be traced. For example, how easy would it be to reduce all notions of morality, nay, indeed, all notions of beauty in painting, or harmony in music, to truth and reality, in opposition to falsehood! Wollaston's Religion of Nature Delineated is an example of this, in which he resolves the morality or immorality of every action, into the truth or falsehood of a proposition. And whoever reads the book, will, I dare say, be sensible, that it is just as natural and proper as a certain noble author's rhapsodies upon beauty and harmony. In short, it were easy to show that none of the accounts given of the nature of virtue have any meaning, truth, or force in them, but so far as they are founded upon, or coincident with, that which I have above given from the word of God.*

* There is one late writer, David Hume, Esq. who, it must be confessed, hath excelled all that went before him in an extraordinary account of the nature of virtue. I have taken no notice above of his principles, if they may be called so, because I think both him and them worthy of the highest contempt; and would have disdained to have made mention of his name, but that it affords me an opportunity of expressing my sense of the wrong measures taken by many worthy and able men, who, in sermons and other discourses, give grave and serious answers to his writings. As to himself, that man must be beyond the reach of conviction by reasoning, who is capable of such an insult upon reason itself and human nature, as to rank all natural advantages, mental and corporeal, among the virtues, and their contraries among the vices. Thus he hath expressly named wit, genius, health, clean-

Thus I have shown, that those who believe the doctrine of imputed righteousness must be most holy in their lives; that the obligations to obedience are not weakened, but strengthened and confirmed by it. This any impartial person may be convinced of, who will reflect, that it is hardly possible to conceive an obligation to duty of any kind, which may not be reduced to one or other of those above-named; and, if I am not mistaken, none of them can operate so strongly upon any other scheme, as that which is here espoused, and which is so evidently founded on the Scriptures of truth.

There is, however, one general consideration, which it would be wrong to omit, in showing the friendly influence of this doctrine upon holiness of life, although it doth not so properly fall under the

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liness, taper legs, and broad shoulders, among his virtues; diseases he also makes vices; and, consistently enough indeed, takes notice of the infectious nature of some diseases, which, I suppose, he reckons an aggravation of the crime. And, as to mankind in general, if they were at that pass as to need a refutation of such nonsense, as well as impiety, it would be in vain to reason with them at all. If I were to contrive an answer to this writer, it would be a visible, instead of a legible answer; it would be to employ a painter to make a portrait of him from the life; to encompass him with a few hieroglyphics, which it would not be difficult to devise; to inscribe upon his breast these words, HEALTH, CLEANLINESS, and BROAD SHOULDERS; and put the following sentence in his mouth, which he hath adopted from a French author, "FEMALE INFIDELITY, when it is known, is a small matter; and when it is not known, is nothing." This would be very proper when applied to his writings, who, as well as his friend and coadjutor without a name, makes "our most important reasoning upon many subjects, to rest ultimately upon sense and feeling." It is probable some over-delicate persons will think this is not treating him with sufficient decency; but till there be a plan agreed upon, of the measures of decency due from infidels to Christians, and from Christians to infidels, whether he does not deserve far worse treatment from any who believes the gospel, I leave to the judgment of those who will read his writings.

notion of a direct obligation; that is, the great encouragement given in it to the study of purity and holiness, by the prospect of success. Despair of success cuts the sinews of diligence in every enterprise. And particularly on the subject of religion, nothing more effectually enervates our resolutions, and leads to a sullen, despondent neglect of duty, than an opinion that we shall not succeed in attempting it, or shall not be accepted in our endeavours after it, or our imperfect attainments in it. But the doctrine of justification by the free grace of God, "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," gives the greatest encouragement to all who will return to their duty. This encouragement naturally divides itself into two branches: 1st, The sure hope of acceptance through Christ. 2dly, The powerful and effectual aid provided for them in the Holy Spirit, which he hath purchased, and bestows for their sanctification.

1st, The sure hope of acceptance through Christ Jesus. Although sin hath greatly blinded the minds of men, there is still so much of "the work of the law written in their hearts," as must make them sensible that in many things they offend, and must give them ground of solicitude and fear, while they expect to be justified by their own merits. Accordingly we find, that except the grossest and boldest infidels, of which sort this age has furnished some examples,* all classes of men confess themselves

* Vide Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion. These essays conclude with an address to the Supreme Being, which contains the following words: "What mortals term sin, thou pronouncest to be only error; for moral evil vanishes, in some measure, from before thy more perfect sight."

guilty of many sins, faults, or failings; some expressing themselves in a stronger, and some in a softer style, according to the greater or lesser degree of the depravation of natural conscience. If there is any meaning then in these words, they must be liable to the displeasure of God in some respects, for which they cannot themselves atone; and must therefore labour under at least much uncertainty as to their acceptance. This must weaken their hands, and slacken their diligence in an attempt so precarious in its issue.

Perhaps some may say, that this is only levelled against those who deny all satisfaction, or all use of the merit of Christ, but not against those who expect to be justified by their own merit, so far as it goes, and trust in their Saviour for making up what is wanting in themselves. But of such I would ask, how they shall be satisfied that they have gone as far with their own merit as is requisite, if there is any stress to be laid upon it at all? Will they say, as some foolishly do, that they do all in their power, and trust in Christ for supplying what may be still deficient? If they dare resolutely stand to this plea at the last day, when God shall judge the secrets of all hearts, that they have done all in their power, there is really nothing wanting to them; they need no Saviour, they need no pardon. But that is what no mere man that ever lived can say with truth. So that upon any scheme, but an entire reliance on the merits of Christ for justification before God, there must still be a dreadful uncertainty, inconsistent with that liberal and ingenuous freedom with which the children of God love and serve him.

These, strongly penetrated with a sense of duty and obligation, deeply humbled under a sense of sin, and resting on the perfect atonement made by their Saviour and substitute, serve him with alacrity and pleasure, wearing the bonds of love. And knowing the weakness of their best services while here, they long for that blessed time when they shall be made perfectly holy, and yet shall for ever acknowledge themselves indebted for their place in heaven, and their continuance there, to the grace of God and the love of their Redeemer.

The other branch of the encouragement which believers in Christ have to diligence in duty, is the promise of the Holy Spirit to lead them into all truth, and guide them to all duty. This promise is expressly made to believers and their seed after them, in every age of the church, to the end of the world. Thus says the apostle Peter, "And ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost; for the promise is to you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." And it is to this plentiful effusion of the Spirit, that the prophets ascribe the purity and prosperity of the church in the latter days: "For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring, and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water-courses."

I am sensible that the nature and form of the argument doth not permit me at once to suppose the truth of this, and to make use of the direct agency and effectual operation of the Spirit of God to prove

the holiness of saints. But it may be easily made to appear, that the belief and persuasion of this must have the strongest influence in animating their own endeavours. What more proper for such a purpose than the belief of an almighty aid, certainly to be exerted in their behalf? Must not this invigorate their powers, and preserve them from sinking through fear of the number and strength of their adversaries? Nothing but ignorance of themselves can make them boast of their own strength. The result of experience in the study of holiness, must be an humbling conviction of the force of temptation and strength of passion on the one hand, and the weakness and feebleness of human reason and resolution on the other. Must it not then be of the greatest advantage to believers, to be under an habitual persuasion of the presence and operation of the Spirit of God to sanctify them wholly? Without this, the attempt would be altogether vain; but this makes the exhortation come with peculiar force and energy—"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

It will be a support to the present argument to observe, that some sense of the weakness of human nature, and its inequality to any thing arduous and difficult, seems to have been pretty universal in every country, and in every age of the world. Thus among the ancient heathens, of whom we have the fullest account, all great enterprises were supposed to be undertaken at the instigation, and executed by the assistance, of some superior power. Their poets always gave out that themselves were inspired, and

their hero directed by some deity; and moderns generally suppose, that the very imagination of this had no small influence on the success of the attempt. The interposition of deities was indeed so remarkable in the most eminent ancient poets, that it has been reckoned a branch of their art, distinguished by a particular name, called the machinery, and is now inseparably joined, at least to one species of poetry. Nay, it was a pretty general belief among some nations, that every particular person had an angel, spirit, or genius, to whose care he was committed, who assisted him in difficulty, and protected him in danger. Does not all this then evidently prove, that a persuasion of superior aid must have the most happy influence on our activity and diligence in duty, and our progress in holiness? Doth it not make it reasonable to expect, that those who trust to nothing better than their own strength, will be proportionably low in their attempts, and deficient in their success; but that those whose eyes are fixed for direction upon God, and who live in a continual dependence on his grace, will become truly partakers of a divine nature?

Now, is not this the distinguishing characteristic of the scheme of redemption by free grace, that it gives less to man and more to God than any other plan? It seems indeed particularly to point at this very design in every part of it, to abase the pride of man, and to exalt the grace of God. Self-denial is the first condition of the gospel, and a renunciation of all self-dependence is the lesson continued through the whole. "Surely in the Lord have I righteousness and strength," may be called the motto of

every Christian, is a short and comprehensive summary of his faith, and the great foundation of his hope and trust. As then it has been shown that he is habitually inclined to obedience, with what alacrity and vigour will he apply himself to his duty, since he believes that almighty power is constantly engaged in his behalf; and that however unable he may be of himself for any thing that is good, yet a thorough and effectual change will be wrought in him by divine power? What a firmness and fortitude must be inspired by the following passage of the prophet Isaiah, and other promises in the same strain—"Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youth shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. But they that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint."

But now, perhaps, after all the advantages of this doctrine, pointed out in the preceding discourse, some will be ready to ask me, if it cannot possibly be applied to the encouragement of impiety, or serve to foster a supine sloth and negligence? To this I am ready to answer, By some who profess it, it may; but by those who really believe it, it never can. There is no part of the word or providence of God that may not be, or that hath not frequently in fact been, abused to bad purposes, by wicked men under

the dominion of their lusts. But, in order to remove ambiguity, it is proper to observe, that wherever there is a national profession of any religious principles, there must be many who are not believers, in any other sense than that they have been accustomed to hear such and such things asserted, have never inquired into, nor doubted, seldom even thought of them, and so do not disbelieve them. But there is a great difference between such a traditionary belief as may produce a customary profession, and such a real and inward persuasion as will change the heart and influence the practice. That there may be some of the first sort of believers in the doctrine of imputed righteousness, who are not holy, or perhaps abuse it, ill understood, to unholiness, I am willing to allow; but that all those who believe it upon real and personal conviction, must be most conscientious in the practice of every moral duty, I hope hath been clearly made appear in the preceding pages.

The above is all that was first intended in the prosecution of this argument; but perhaps it will not be improper, before dismissing the subject, to make a few reflections upon the reception which it hath met with, and must still expect to meet with in the world; upon its importance and proper application.

It is very certain, being neither denied by friends nor enemies, that this doctrine hath, in all ages, not only been attacked with the weapons of human wisdom, but generally also loaded with much reproach and contempt. After, therefore, it hath been so far defended as may satisfy every impartial mind, and its influence upon practice demonstrated, I observe, that whatever impression this fact may make upon

others, it seems to me no small confirmation of its truth as coming from God, that it is contrary to the spirit of the world. This is both agreeable to Scripture and to sound reason. The doctrine of "Christ crucified," the apostle Paul tells us, "was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness." And, speaking of the effect of the publication of this doctrine, he says, "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are." This we are not to understand as if the apostle yielded that the gospel was not agreeable to true wisdom, or that the proper and legitimate use of human wisdom would not lead us to embrace it: but it contains a strong intimation of a truth not commonly attended to, that great natural abilities have pretty much the same influence on the moral character, with great wealth or temporal prosperity. They are both apt to intoxicate the mind, and lead to pride, arrogance, and self-conceit: and perhaps intellectual pride is as great an obstruction to the discovery of truth, as any bad disposition whatsoever. We are also taught, that God ordered and disposed of things in this manner, for the wise ends of his providence, for the subjection of the arrogance and boasted wisdom of men; or, in the words of the apostle, "That no flesh should glory in his presence." The reception

then, which this doctrine usually meets with, should be so far from remaining as a prejudice or objection against its truth or utility, that, on the contrary, it should contribute to satisfy us, that it is the real and genuine doctrine of Christ, since it meets with the same sort of opposition, and from the same quarter, with which this was encountered at its first publication.

And indeed, besides this exact correspondence between the event, and what the Scripture gives us reason to expect as to the reception of the gospel in the world, I apprehend it ought to be a general prejudice in favour of its truth, considering the original it claims, that it doth not carry on it any of the marks of human wisdom. It seems to lie (if I may so speak) quite out of the way of human imagination and contrivance, and is diametrically opposite, in its whole tendency, to the most prevailing human inclination, namely, self-esteem, pride, and vain-glory. This indeed is the true reason why this doctrine is so unacceptable to the world, especially the ambitious part of it, that it is directly levelled against their corrupt affections. It gives a view of the holiness, purity, and justice of God, which is intolerable to all those who are not willing to break their league with sin and vanity. And when it is truly complied with, it not only divorces men from their former attachment to sin and sensuality, but will not suffer them to glory, even in their new character. All who submit unfeignedly to the gospel, both feel and confess themselves wholly indebted for forgiveness and acceptance, for their present holiness and their future happiness, to the free unmerited grace of God. How

hard such a sacrifice is, none can conceive who have not some acquaintance with vital, experimental religion. Now, what is the most natural inference from this? Is it not, that we have not the smallest reason to suspect this doctrine to be a cunningly-devised fable," but may rest assured, that it is "the wisdom and the power of God for salvation, to every one that believeth?"

This leads me to observe, That if the reasoning which the reader hath perused upon this subject be just and conclusive, there is one circumstance in which this "doctrine according to godliness" essentially differs from all other schemes or systems of morality. It is, that any of these systems a man may understand, embrace, and defend, without having his heart made better, or his morals secured or improved by it at all; whereas it is impossible that any man can really, and from the heart, embrace the doctrine of Christ's imputed righteousness, without being sanctified by it, "dead to sin, and alive to God." That the first of these assertions is true, the lives and characters of some noted writers on the foundation of morality, have been, and are an undeniable proof. Some of them do indeed expressly yield it; and it is evidently yielded, by implication, in all the late writings, where there is so frequent mention of the small influence that speculation has upon practice. On this is founded what a late acute and eminent writer* justly calls the master-prejudice of this age, namely, "The innocence of error." This may as well be expressed by its counterpart, the unprofitable-

* Mr. Warburton.

ness or inefficacy of truth, which surely ought to be but a weak recommendation of what is called truth, by those who hold such an opinion.

That the other assertion is just, hath been the point undertaken to be made out in this Essay; and whoever will but consider how unacceptable this doctrine is to mankind in general, may be satisfied that there can be no effectual inducement to embrace it, till there be such a discovery and sense of the evil and danger of sin, as is utterly inconsistent with a voluntary continuance in it. The apparent state of the visible church, in which vice and wickedness so shamefully abound, will be no objection to this, if what I hinted above be recollected,* that there is a great difference between a nominal or customary profession and real belief. As to the few more zealous and eminent assertors of this doctrine, who sometimes greatly dishonour their profession, the answer is easy: They are hypocrites, by whom indeed great offences do come; and the weak and unstable fall over the stumbling-block, and are tempted to doubt the reality of religion, by this discovery of the falsehood of its professors. But such can never be fairly ranked among believers, whose garb and habit they only treacherously wore for some time, while they were in the interest of another master. We may say of them as the apostle John says, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us; but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us."

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* See page 72.

But this is not all: for the reception of the doctrine of imputed righteousness is not merely to be considered as the best means, comparatively, of producing, preserving, and increasing our sanctification and purity, as sure and effectual, while others are precarious, but it is the only way, and all others are absolutely insufficient for the purpose. If this be indeed the doctrine of Christ, the Scripture method of salvation, then it is not only true, but a fundamental truth. Of this we are frequently and solemnly assured in the word of God. "I am the way, (says our Saviour,) and the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me." So say the apostles Peter and John: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved." It is therefore in vain for any to expect an effectual change of life, but by an acquaintance with Christ and him crucified. We have indeed the clearest evidence from experience, that no human reason, no argument whatever, drawn from worldly conveniency, is at all sufficient to contend with violent and sinful habits. We see many examples of persons of excellent understanding and knowledge in other matters, nay, who can reason strongly and justly upon the bad consequences of vice in others, sometimes even in themselves, who will yet go on to ruin their name, family, fortune, and health, while they are slaves to evil habits—nothing will change them but the grace of God.

And as we have seen above, that our own righteousness, in its best state, is wholly ineffectual for our acceptance with God, so all who have any expec-

tations of this kind from it, plainly show that they have such defective views of the extent and obligation of the divine law, as are inconsistent with an unfeigned, universal submission to it. This is a matter of the last importance, and ought to be particularly recommended to the serious consideration of such as may have, at some times, some imperfect convictions; such as, from a weariness and satiety of sinning, may give a temporary preference to a life of religion, and raise a feeble and ineffectual wish with Balaam, that they might "die the death of the righteous." They ought to be told, that no endeavours to be a little better than before; no abstinence from some sins, as a kind of atonement for others retained; no resolutions taken in their own strength; no righteousness of their own offered or trusted in as a matter of their justification, will be accepted, or is worthy of being so: that nothing will be truly effectual, till they see their lost condition, and believe in Christ, first for pardon, and then for sanctification, "to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved." If they have any other plea, any other ground of hope and trust, it shall undoubtedly fail them; they must remain under a sentence of just and legal condemnation, and shall finally perish: for "he that believeth in the Son hath everlasting life; but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."*

* The application of these passages of Scripture, to the particular principles above maintained, will perhaps be thought to include in it a very severe and uncharitable condemnation of many Christians, who differ in judgment upon the point of justification. And indeed I pretend no great friendship to the sentiments so

I am naturally led to conclude this subject by observing, that the importance, efficacy, and necessity of the imputed righteousness of Christ, shows how much it is the duty of all ministers of the gospel to make it the main and leading theme of their sermons. The preaching of the gospel, is by the apostle Paul, in a very just and expressive manner, styled preaching "the unsearchable riches of Christ." In him every prophecy, precept, promise, and truth is centered. His character and work as a Saviour is held

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[f] requently expressed of late, "That it is a small matter what a man believes, if his life be good." The assertion might perhaps be allowed, if it did not contain a foolish and unreasonable supposition, that a man may believe wrong, and yet lead as good a life as he that believes right; the contrary to which will always be expected by him who gives credit to the word of God, that his people are "sanctified through the truth." As to Socinians and Pelagians, who are the greatest opposers of the truths above defended, I never did esteem them to be Christians at all; so the consequence, with regard to them, may be easily admitted. But it will be thought hard to say the same thing of the Arminians. However, if the righteousness of Christ is the only ground of our justification, and the reception of him in this character the true principle of sanctification, I do not see how we can avoid concluding the danger of those who act upon any other plan. And yet I am persuaded there have been, and are many good men among them; which may be accounted for in this manner, that their hearts are better than their understandings; and they are habitually under the government of principles which, through some mistaken views and groundless fears of their abuse, they speak of more sparingly, or rather seem to establish the contrary positions. The proof of this assertion I take from their own writings, particularly from the difference between their sermons and other discourses, and those forms of prayer which they have drawn up, and not only recommended to others, but left behind them as a witness of their own exercise in their closets. If they be supposed to feel the sentiments which they express in their prayers, it can be easily made appear, that these sentiments can only be dictated by the doctrine of free grace. If what they say of themselves be true in its natural and obvious meaning, and if they believe it, which charity obliges us to suppose, it must be altogether vain to lay the least stress upon their own righteousness for their acceptance with God.

forth in a variety of lights in the sacred oracles, and in every opening or view that is given us, so to speak, of the dispensations of divine Providence and grace, he is the chief figure, or the termination of the prospect. If therefore we would know what esteem is due to our Redeemer in our hearts, and how high a place he ought to hold in our views of religion, let us observe the regard paid to him by the sacred writers. They derive almost all their motives to every moral duty, from what he hath done, and is still doing for us, and seem to delight even in the repetition of his name. I am persuaded those who are accustomed to the devout and serious perusal of the word of God, will not reckon it "enthusiasm," when I say, that these writers appear to be warmed and elevated above their ordinary measure, when they celebrate his salvation; and that both in the Old and New Testament, wherever we meet with any passage singularly lofty and sublime, there we may be sure that Christ the Redeemer is the immediate theme.

Justification by the free grace of God, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, was the doctrine taught among Christians, in the earliest and purest ages of the church. And their departure from it was the prelude to that universal corruption of faith and worship, that relaxation of discipline, and dissolution of manners, which took place in the ages following. It is also very remarkable, that this doctrine was always fully and distinctly taught in those churches which never submitted to the tyranny, or received the corruptions of the Romish Antichrist; I mean the churches of the Piedmontese valleys, which, by so many judicious writers, are supposed to be the

two witnesses mentioned in the Revelation, who fled into the wilderness from the persecution of the beast, and prophesied in sackcloth.

The accounts which have been transmitted to us of the principles held by them, long before the Reformation, plainly show, that they maintained this doctrine from the beginning. And as it is well known that the Reformation took its first rise from the gross and scandalous application of the doctrine of merit in indulgences, so all the reformers, without exception, were strenuous assertors of free grace. This was reckoned by them, "articulus stantis aut cadentis ecclesiæ," by which the church must stand or fall. Particularly, our reformers in both parts of this island, agreed in preaching the same doctrine; and the eminent piety of our fathers is a standing evidence of its force and efficacy.

It doth not perhaps become, and probably it would not be safe for me, to enter into a particular examination of the manner of preaching in the present age; and therefore my reflections upon that subject shall be very few and general. What is most obvious in our present situation, and what ought to affect Christians with most concern, is the great prevalence of infidelity. This is the more surprising, that we have never wanted, and do not at present want, many able and eminent writers to stand up in defence of the gospel, and refute the changeable and inconsistent reasonings of infidels, whatever form they shall from time to time think fit to assume, and on whatever principles they shall pretend to build. But, I am afraid, the best defence of all is but too much neglected, namely, zealous, assiduous preaching the

great and fundamental truths of the gospel, the lost, condemned state of man by nature, and the necessity of pardon through the righteousness, and renovation by the Spirit of Christ. This would make a far greater number of those who call themselves by the name of Christ, Christians indeed. And the visible efficacy of his doctrine would be a sensible demonstration of its truth and divine original. If these truths are not contradicted, it may be safely said, that they are by many kept more out of view than formerly. And surely we have no great cause to boast of our improvements in the preaching art, if its goodness is to be determined, like that of a tree, not by its blossoms, but its fruits.

There is one observation which may satisfy us that the preaching of the cross of Christ will most effectually promote real reformation. It is, that those preachers who (to say no more) approach nearest to making our own merit and obedience the ground of our acceptance with God, very seldom, if ever, give any alarm to the consciences of their hearers. Let them recommend ever so pure and high a standard of morals, they are heard without fear, and, if they preach elegantly, with pleasure, even by the most profligate. To such preachers, all vain worldly-minded people usually attach themselves, where they have not cast off the very form of religion; but most part of serious Christians, together with professing hypocrites, who cannot easily be distinguished in this world, always follow preachers of another strain. It is easy to see the reason of this from what hath been said above; there are none who set the strictness and obligation of the law, the holiness and justice of God, in so aw-

ful a light as those who believe there is no shelter from the sanction of the law, and the wrath of an offended God, but in the blood of Christ. Perhaps I am already ensnared and exposed to censure, by affirming that there are among us preachers of different strains. But it is so certain a truth that I cannot deny it, and so important that I will not disguise it.

Upon the whole, as the present aspect of public affairs, as the state of the world and character of the age, loudly call upon all, of every station, to exert themselves with diligence for the support and revival of truth and righteousness, I hope the ministers of the gospel will promote this end, by zealously labouring to bring men to the saving knowledge of Christ, "the way, and the truth, and the life—the foundation—the tried stone—the precious corner-stone"—the strength and security of the building. To deny, explain away, or neglect to impart the truths of the everlasting gospel, is the way to leave the world in wickedness; but by preaching them in purity and with simplicity, which, we have reason to think, will be accompanied with "the demonstration of the Spirit," sinners are reconciled unto God, the power of sin is broken in them, the divine image is formed in them, and upon these truths their hopes of eternal life must rest and depend. Let us be ever ready to say with the apostle Paul, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." And let us quicken our diligence, and animate our endeavours, by expressing, with the Psalmist David, our faith in the perpetuity of his kingdom: "His name shall endure for ever: his

name shall be continued as long as the sun; and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed. Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen, and Amen."

A

PRACTICAL TREATISE

ON

REGENERATION.

A

PRACTICAL TREATISE

ON

REGENERATION.

JOHN iii. 3.

"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

INTRODUCTION.

THE condition on which ministers of the gospel hold their office, is extremely awful. "They must render an account unto God" of their fidelity to the souls committed to their charge. Their duty and danger, as servants of God, are jointly and strongly expressed in the commission given to the prophet Ezekiel: "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wicked-

ness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul."

It is natural for us, in such a situation, to be often revolving in our minds this great and weighty trust. It is at once our duty and interest, to consider, with all possible care, in what way we may have the easiest and most effectual access to the hearts of sinners; what views of divine truth will be most convincing; what forms of address will make the strongest and most lasting impression: in one word, how we may acquit ourselves in our ministry, so as to be a "savour of life unto life," to many of those who hear us, and to "deliver our own souls" from the blood of those that perish.

Such indeed is the undeniable moment and importance of the truths of the gospel, that I am often ready to think it will be easy to set them in so clear and convincing a light, as no person of common understanding shall be able to resist. I am often ready to say within myself, Surely if they be warned, they will no more dare to rush on the thick bosses of the Almighty's buckler; surely the boldest sinner must tremble at the thoughts of death, judgment, and eternity fast approaching, and from which it is impossible to flee. But when we see how many are able to sit unmoved under the most awful threatenings from the word of God; how many continue unchanged under the most alarming dispensations of Providence, our thoughts are immediately carried to the unsearchable depth of the divine counsels, and we must say with our blessed Saviour, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight;" or with the apostle Paul, "But if our gospel be hid, it is

hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

The secret counsel of the Most High, however, though we must adore with reverence, it is impossible for us to comprehend. What influence this has upon the final state of particular persons, no man in the present life is, and probably no created being shall ever be able fully to explain. This only we know, that it is not such as to take away the guilt of sin, or destroy the efficacy of means. A sense of duty, therefore, constrains us to resume the arduous and difficult task, entreating the assistance and blessing of God, under a firm persuasion that he will hear the prayer of faith, and make his own word "quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and the marrow, and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

The subject I have made choice of, and intend to handle in the ensuing treatise, immediately regards the substance of religion, and is happily as little entangled in controversy as any that could be named. We are told that "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." In this all parties, every profession and denomination of Christians, do or ought to agree. By whatever name you are called, whatsoever leader you profess to follow, whatever ordinances you enjoy, if you are not "born again," you shall not enter into the kingdom of God.

That manner of preaching the gospel, explaining or recommending divine truth, appears to me most

profitable, which brings oftenest into view, or rather never loses view, of the great and essential difference between believers and unbelievers, saints and sinners, heirs of glory and heirs of hell. These are mixed together on earth. They have common privileges as men and citizens. They cannot be certainly distinguished by human observation; for though the image of God shines in a bright and sensible manner in some on the one hand, and some bear very plain and deadly symptoms on the other, whose state may be determined with little hazard of mistake, yet, in the intermediate degrees, there are multitudes whose real character is known only to God. What then can be said more awakening, and at the same time more certainly true, than that every hearer of the gospel, and every reader of such a treatise as this, is either reconciled to God, and the object of his love, or at enmity with God, having "neither part nor portion" in his favour; and as many as die in this last condition, shall be the everlasting monuments of divine wrath? How important a distinction! and can any man refrain from saying, 'Lord, thou knowest all things—to which of these classes do I belong?'

But there is something, if possible, still more pressing in the passage of Scripture which I have placed at the head of this discourse. Not only are all men of two different and opposite characters now, but all men are originally of one character, unfit for the kingdom of God: unless a change has passed upon them they continue so; and unless a change do pass upon them hereafter, they must be for ever exeluded. This our Lord introduees with a strong asseveration,

and signal note of importance: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." These words were spoken to Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This "master in Israel," came to Jesus by night. Convinced he seems to have been of the power which attended his ministry, but, under a still stronger attachment to his worldly interest, he durst not openly avow his conviction. Our Lord, at once to enlighten his mind with the most salutary of all truths, and level his pride of understanding by the manner of conveying it, saith to him, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." This appears to have been extremely astonishing, by his answer in the following verse: "Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

It is not my purpose to give a tedious explication of the passage, or entertain the reader with a profusion of criticism upon the words. This expression, "the kingdom of God," hath various significations in Scripture, but chiefly two in the New Testament: 1. The gospel dispensation, or government of the Messiah, as distinguished from the preceding periods. 2. The kingdom of heaven, where the sincere disciples of Christ shall be put in full possession of the blessings of his purchase.—I take it to be the last of these that is either only or chiefly intended in this place. Both of them indeed may be meant in their proper order, and for their different purposes. An open profession and receiving the external badge, was necessary to a concealed friend and cowardly disciple;

but a right to the spiritual privileges of the gospel, and the promise of eternal life, was the only thing that could make the profession valuable or desirable. Accordingly, our Saviour seems to speak of both in his reply to Nicodemus' admission into the visible church by baptism, and renovation by the Holy Ghost. Jesus answered, "Verily I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

I am sensible that regeneration, or the new birth, is a subject at present very unfashionable; or at least a style of language which hath gone very much into desuetude. It is, however, a subject of unspeakable moment, or rather, it is the one subject in which all others meet as in a centre; the grand inquiry, in comparison of which, every thing else, how excellent soever, is but specious trifling. What doth it signify, though you have food to eat in plenty, and variety of raiment to put on, if you are not born again? if, after a few mornings and evenings spent in unthinking mirth, sensuality, and riot, you die in your sins and lie down in sorrow? What doth it signify, though you are well accomplished in every other respect, to act your part in life, if you meet at last with this repulse from the supreme Judge, "Depart from me, I know you not, ye workers of iniquity?"

If this subject is indeed unfashionable and neglected, we are miserably deceiving ourselves. If a new nature is necessary, to attempt to repair and new-model the old will be found to be lost labour. If the spring is polluted and continues so, what a vain and fruitless attempt is it to endeavour, by addition or by foreign mixture, to purify the streams.

Just so it is by no means sufficient, or, to speak more properly, it is altogether impossible to reform the irregularities and vicious lives of sinners, and bring them to a real conformity to the law of God, till their hearts are renewed and changed. It is like rearing up an old fabric, adding to its towers, and painting its walls, while the foundation is gone. See what the prophet Ezekiel says of such foolish builders: "Woe to the foolish prophets—because, even because they have seduced my people, saying, Peace, and there was no peace; and one built up a wall, and, lo, others daubed it with untempered mortar: Say unto them which daub it with untempered mortar, that it shall fall: there shall be an overflowing shower; and ye, O great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall rend it."

But perhaps the substance of the doctrine is retained, while the language is held in derision. We are told it is but a figurative expression, and the same in its meaning with repentance or reformation. Doubtless it is so. And it were greatly to be wished, that many did thoroughly understand what is implied in repentance unto life. But the reader is entreated to observe, that it is a metaphor frequently used in the Holy Scripture. I think also it is a metaphor of peculiar propriety and force, well adapted to bring into view, both the nature of the change which it describes, and the means by which it is accomplished. If there are any who, in writing or speaking on this subject, have introduced or invented unscriptural phrases, and gone into unintelligible mysticism, this is neither wonderful in itself, nor ought it to be any injury or disparagement to the truth. There is no

subject, either of divine or human learning, on which some have not written weakly, foolishly, or erroneously; but that ought not to excite any aversion to the doctrine itself which hath been perverted or abused. I pray that God may enable me to write upon this interesting subject, in a clear, intelligible, and convincing manner; to support the truth from the evidence of Scripture and reason; to resolve, in a satisfying manner, any objections that may seem to lie against it; but, above all, to carry it home with a persuasive force upon the conscience and heart. I contend for no phrases of man's invention, but for such as I find in the Holy Scriptures: from these I am resolved, through the grace of God, never to depart. And in the mean time I adopt the words of the eminent and useful Dr. Doddridge: "If this doctrine, in one form or another, be generally taught by my brethren in the ministry, I rejoice in it for their own sakes, as well as for that of the people who are under their care."

The plan of the following treatise is this:—

I. To make some general observations upon the metaphor used by the apostle John, "Except a man be born again;" and the same or similar expressions to be found in other parts of the word of God.

II. To show wherein this change doth properly and directly consist, together with some of its principal evidences and effects.

III. To show by what steps, or by what means, it is usually brought about.

IV. In the last place, to improve the subject by a few practical addresses to persons of different characters.

CHAPTER I.

Some general observations on the metaphor used by the apostle John, Except a man be born again, *and the same or similar expressions, to be found in other parts of the word of God.*

It deserves the serious attention of every Christian, that, as this declaration was made by our Saviour in a very solemn manner, and by a very peculiar metaphor, so this is not the single passage in which the same metaphor is used. We find it in the apostle Paul's epistle to Titus, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." We find one perfectly similar to it, in the same apostle's second epistle to the Corinthians, "Therefore, if any man be in Christ he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." It is elsewhere called a new creation, with reference to the power exerted in the production. "For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." It is still a figure of the same kind that is used when we are exhorted "to put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and to be renewed in the spirit of our mind, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." To

name no more passages, the real believer is said to be "born of God," 1 John v. 4. in which the very expression of the text is repeated, and the change attributed to God as his proper work.

Whoever believes in the perfection of the Scriptures, will readily admit that it is intended we should learn something from this very way of speaking itself. Let us therefore consider what may be safely deduced from it. And, as I would not willingly strain the metaphor, and draw from it any uncertain conclusion, so it is no part of my design to run it out into an extraordinary length. Many smaller resemblances might easily be formed between the image and the truth, but they would be more fanciful than useful. The reader is only entreated to attend to a few leading truths, which seem naturally to arise from this metaphor, and may be both supported and illustrated from the whole tenor of Scripture doctrine.

SECTION I. From this expression, *Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*, we may learn the GREATNESS of that change which must pass upon every child of Adam, before he can become an heir of life.

No stronger expression could have been chosen to signify a great and remarkable change of state and character, whether we take the metaphor in a stricter or a looser sense. If we take the metaphor in a stricter sense, it may be intended to point out the change of state in an infant newly born, from what it was immediately before the birth. The manner

of its existence, of deriving its nourishment, the use and application of its faculties, and its desires and enjoyments, are all entirely different. If we take the metaphor in a looser sense, being born may be considered as the beginning of our existence. To this sense we seem to be directed by the other expressions, of being created in Christ Jesus, and made new creatures. Does not this still teach us the greatness of the change? We must be entirely different from what we were before, as one creature differs from another, or as that which begins to be at any time, is not, nor cannot be the same with what did formerly exist.

This may also be well supported from a variety of other passages of Scripture, and is a consequence of different truths contained in the word of God. For example, our natural state is in Scripture compared to death, and our recovery to our being restored to life. Thus the apostle Paul, in writing to the Ephesians, says, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." And a little after, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ." To the same purpose the apostle John says, "We know that we have passed from death unto life." The change is sometimes described by passing from darkness to light; than which two things, none can stand in greater opposition to one another: "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord." Every one must be sensible how easy it would be to multiply passages of the same kind. But this I forbear, and only wish we had all of us a deep im-

pression of the meaning and importance of these upon our hearts.

It will not be improper, however, to observe how plainly the same truth appears from the power which the Scripture represents as exerted in bringing a sinner from a state of nature to a state of grace. It is constantly affirmed to be the work of God, the effect of his power, nay, the exceeding greatness of his power. "By grace ye are saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you to will and to do of his good pleasure." "And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead." Now, is there any need of a divine agent to perform a work of no moment? Would it be celebrated as an effect of the power of God if it were not truly great?

Let me now, in the most earnest manner, beseech every person who reads these lines, to consider deliberately with himself what is the import of this truth, and how firmly it is established. It appears that regeneration, repentance, conversion, or call it what you will, is a very great change from the state in which every man comes into the world. This appears from our Saviour's assertion, that we must be "born again." It appears from a great variety of other Scripture phrases, and is the certain consequence of some of the most essential doctrines of the Gospel.

With what jealousy ought this to fill many of the

state of their souls? How slight and inconsiderable a thing is it that, with multitudes, passes for religion; especially in these days of serenity and sunshine to the church, when they are not compelled by danger to weigh the matter with deliberation! A few cold forms, a little outward decency, some faint desires rather than endeavours, are all they can afford for securing their everlasting happiness. Can the weakness and insufficiency of these things possibly appear in a stronger light, than when true religion is considered as a new creation and a second birth? If the inspired writers be allowed to express themselves either with propriety or truth, it is painful to think of the unhappy deluded state of so great a number of our fellow sinners.

Will so great a change take place, and yet have no visible effect? Had any great change happened in your worldly circumstances, from riches to poverty, or from poverty to riches, all around you would have speedily discerned it. Had any such change happened in your health, it had been impossible to conceal it. Had it happened in your intellectual accomplishments, from ignorance to knowledge, it would have been quickly celebrated. How comes it then to be quite undiscernible, when it is from sin to holiness? I am sensible that men are very ingenious in justifying their conduct, and very successful in deceiving themselves. They will tell us that religion is a hidden thing, not to be seen by the world, but lying open to his view who judgeth the secrets of all hearts. And doubtless this is, in one view, a great truth. True religion is not given to ostentation; diffident of itself, it is unwilling to promise much,

lest it should be found wanting. But it ought to be considered that, however concealed the inward principle may be, the practical effects must of necessity appear. As one table of the moral law consists entirely of our duty to others, whoever is born again, and renewed in the spirit of his mind, will be found a quite different person from what he was before, in his conversation with his fellow-creatures.

Hypocritical pretences to extraordinary sanctity are indeed highly criminal in themselves, and extremely odious in the sight of God. But the present age does not seem to have the least tendency to this extreme. There is another thing much more common, not less absurd, and infinitely more dangerous to mankind in general—a demand upon the public, that, by an extraordinary effort of charity, they should always suppose the reality of religion in the heart, when there is not the least symptom of it in the life. Nay, some are hardly satisfied even with this, but insist that men should believe well of others, not only without, but against evidence. A bad opinion expressed of a man, even upon the most open instances of profanity, is often answered with, "What have you to do to judge the heart?" It is amazing to think what inward consolation sinners derive to themselves from this claim of forbearance from their fellow creatures. Let me beseech all such to consider, that as God cannot be deceived, and will not be mocked, so in truth they usually deceive none but themselves. Every human affection, when it is strong and lively, will discover itself by its apparent effects; and it is as true of religious affec-

tions as of any other, that "the tree is known by its fruits."

But if they have reason to suspect themselves whose change is not visible to others, how much more those who, if they deal faithfully, must confess they are quite strangers to any such thing in their own hearts. I do not mean that every person should be able to give an account of the time and manner of his conversion. That is often effected in so slow and gradual a manner, that it cannot be confined to a precise or particular period. But surely, those who are no way sensible of any change in the course of their affections, and the objects at which they are pointed, can scarcely think that they are born again, or be able to affix a proper meaning to so strong an expression. I have read an observation of an eminent author, That those who cannot remember the time when they were ignorant or unlearned, have reason to conclude that they are so still; because, however slow and insensible the steps of improvement have been, the effects will at last clearly appear, by comparison with an uncultivated state. In the same manner, whoever cannot remember the time when he served the former lusts in his ignorance, has reason to conclude that no change deserving the name of regeneration has ever yet taken place.

It will be, perhaps, accounted an exception to this, that some are so early formed for the service of God, by his blessing on a pious education, and happily preserved from ever entering upon the destructive paths of vice, that they cannot be supposed to recollect the time when they were at enmity with God. But this is an objection of no consequence. The

persons here described have generally so much tenderness of conscience, so deep a sense of the evil of sin, that of all others they will most readily discover and confess the workings of corruption in their own hearts, and that "law in their members that warreth against the law of God in their minds." They will be of all others most sensible of the growth of the new, and mortification of the old nature; and will often remember the folly and vanity of youth in instances that by most others would have been reckoned perfectly harmless.

What hath been said in this section, is expressly designed to awaken such secure and careless formalists as may have any general belief of the word of God. To be born again must be a great change. Can you then suppose that you have undergone this, not only without any application to it, but without so much as being sensible of it, or being able to discover its proper effects?

SECTION II. This expression, *Except a man be born again*, and other similar expressions, imply, that the change here intended is not merely partial, but universal.

A new birth evidently implies a universal change. It must be of the whole man, not in some particulars, but in all without exception. As this is a truth which naturally arises from the subject, so it is a truth of the last moment and importance, which merits the most serious attention of all those who desire to keep themselves from illusion and self-deceit in this interesting question.

Innumerable are the deceits of Satan. If he cannot keep sinners in absolute blindness and security, which is his first attempt, he industriously endeavours to pervert their views of religion, either by causing them to mistake appearances for realities, or substituting a part for the whole. This branch of the subject is of the more consequence, that I am persuaded it is peculiarly applicable to great numbers of the ordinary hearers of the gospel as such. The great bulk of those who finally fall short of everlasting life, though they lived under the administration of the word and sacraments, are ruined by mistakes of this kind. There are few of them, if any at all, who have at no time, through their whole lives, any serious impressions about their souls, or do nothing in the way of religion. There are still fewer who are speculative unbelievers, and fortify themselves in their profane practices by irreligious principles. The far greatest number do some things, and abstain from others, to quiet the inward complaints of conscience, and must have some broken reed or other on which they may rest their eternal hopes.

It might serve in general to alarm such persons, that, as I have observed above, the change is evidently very great, and therefore they ought not easily to suppose that it is already past. But I now add something still more awakening, that the change, however great, if it is only partial, is not such as is necessary to salvation. There may be a change truly great in some particulars, from one period of life to another, not only sensible to a man's self, but visible and remarkable to others about him, which yet is not saving, because it is not general, or because

it is not permanent. The truth of this observation, that the change must be universal, appears from the constant tenor of the holy Scriptures. Thus the Psalmist says, "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto ALL thy commandments." And the apostle James, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." It is indeed so much the language of Scripture, that it is needless to insist upon it. God will be served without a rival, and will not share dominion with any in the human heart. But what I am persuaded will be of most use upon this subject, will be to point out, in a few particulars, by what means a partial change is sometimes brought about, and how this differs from that which is saving and universal.

1. In the first place, Sometimes a partial change in point of morals, is produced merely by a natural or accidental change in age, temper, or situation. There are different sins to which men are addicted in the different periods or stages of the human life. These, of consequence, give way to, and are succeeded by one another. There are, indeed, instances of extraordinary depravation in some persons, who, "selling themselves," like Ahab, to work iniquity, become the slaves of almost every evil habit incident to human nature. These, however, are esteemed monsters even by the world in general, who continue in the commission of every sin while they can, and burn with desires after them when they cannot. But it often happens that the folly and levity, nay, even the dissolute licentiousness of youth, gives way to the ambitious projects of riper years, and the hurry

of an active life; and these again are succeeded by sordid, selfish, and covetous old age. In many cases the sins are changed, but the disposition to sin, and aversion from God remain still the same. One sin may easily be supplanted by another, in a heart that is wholly a stranger to renewing grace. How greatly then may men deceive themselves, by drawing favourable conclusions from even a great and remarkable change in some one or more particulars, while they continue under the government of sins of a different kind. It is of small consequence which of the commandments of God are transgressed, since they are all of equal and indispensable obligation. It is of little moment for a man to get quit of one distemper, by contracting another equally inveterate, and as certainly mortal. What profit was it to the Pharisee that he was not an extortioner like the publican? His pride rendered him still more odious and detestable in the sight of God.

I may add here, that besides the common and necessary change of age and temper, a change of situation, employment, and connections, will sometimes wean a man from one sin, and introduce an attachment to another. If the temptation is removed, the fire may be extinguished for want of fuel. The inclination to sin in some kinds may be thus occasionally weakened, or the commission of it rendered impossible. It is easy to see that such a change as this can be of no avail in the sight of God; or rather, to speak more properly, it is only an apparent, and no real change at all. It is a difference of effect from an alteration of circumstances, but arising from the very same cause. Are there not many who may

apply this reflection to themselves? Are there not many who have ceased to sin in some respects, because they have begun to sin in others? Are there not many who are abused and deceived by this delusory view? who take comfort to themselves by remembering some species of sins or follies which they now sincerely and heartily despise? Take heed that this be not entirely owing to your progress through life, or a change of circumstances and situation. Are you not still living as much to yourselves as ever? as much averse from a life of love to, and communion with God as ever? Remember, that though your conduct may be wiser and more prudent, and your character more respectable in the world than before, this is no proof of regeneration; and "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

2. Sometimes a partial change is produced by strong occasional convictions, either from the word or providence of God. There are many instances in which convictions of sin are raised in the minds of the hearers of the gospel, which continue in great force for some time, and have a partial effect which still remains. Even a Felix is sometimes made to tremble at the thoughts of a judgment to come. It is very certain that natural conscience, when awakened by the word of God, will both restrain from sin, and excite to duty, even while sin hath the dominion upon the whole. As the spirit lusteth against the flesh, and the flesh against the spirit, in believers, so conscience, the divine witness in the hearts of unbelievers, may urge to the practice of duty in a certain measure, where it is not able to change the

heart inwardly and universally. It may deter from sins to which the attachment is less strong, even whilst it is not able to expel a darling lust, or dethrone a favourite idol.

There is a remarkable example of this character in Herod, and his behaviour to John Baptist. We are told by the evangelist Mark, that "Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly." That is to say, he did many such things as were least contrary to the bent of corrupt affection. But that the change was not entire is plain; for when he was reproved for his beloved lust, it only served to inflame his resentment, and he took away the life of his reprover. We find that Ahab, king of Israel, of whom it is said, that he "did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger, than all that went before him," yet humbled himself on the denunciation of divine wrath, and was so far penitent as served to procure a suspension of the temporal stroke.

It appears, indeed, from innumerable instances in Scripture, as well as from daily experience, that there are temporary convictions, raised in the minds of many, both by the word and providence of God. It is also certain, that there are imperfect effects of these convictions, which often continue a considerable time, or rather are perpetual, though they are still only partial. Many sinners, though they continue unrenewed, yet dare not return to the same unbounded license as before. Nay, there are some sins, under the penal effects of which they have severely smarted, which they never dare afterwards

to indulge. We have a very remarkable national instance of this imperfect reformation in the Jews. They were at first shamefully and amazingly prone to idolatry, and continued so under repeated strokes, till the terrible desolation they met with at the Babylonish captivity: from that period, however, notwithstanding their great guilt in other particulars, they never returned to idolatry, but to this day continue to have the deepest abhorrence of that capital crime.

There are many particular persons in the same situation. Some sins which have lain heavy on their consciences, or for which they have severely suffered in the course of Providence, they will not commit; but others, one or more, which may be called their "own iniquity," they hold fast, and will not let them go. Are there not different degrees of depravation and obstinacy to be found in different sinners, as well as different degrees of holiness, obedience, and submission, in the children of God? And though there is usually a progress in the first to the worse, as well as in the last to the better, yet still there may be particular sins which they dare not commit, and particular duties which they diligently discharge. Nay, this partial character is often the very thing that blinds their minds, and continues their security in a habitual alienation of heart from the life and power of true religion.

Are there not many customary Christians who have a form of godliness, and, though they are utter strangers to communion with God, yet nothing will induce them to part with their form? Are there not many whom it would be unjust to brand with the

grosser crimes of profane swearing, sensual riot, or unclean lust, who yet have their hearts set upon the world, which they love and pursue, and on which they rest with complacency, as their sweetest portion? Are all outwardly decent and sober persons ready to take up the cross, and follow their Master without the camp? Are they ready to forsake "houses, and brethren, and sisters, and lands, yea, and their own life also, for his sake and the gospel's?" And yet without this they cannot be his disciples. There are many hard sayings in religion, which ordinary professors cannot bear, and with which they never comply. Remember the case of the young man who came to our Saviour, and spoke with so much modesty and discretion, but could not bear this great trial: "Then Jesus, beholding him, loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved; for he had great possessions."

3. Sometimes a partial change is produced in a great measure even by the love and attachment which men have to some one darling and governing sin. The less willing they are to cut off the right hand, and to pluck out the right eye, the more zealous and diligent they will be in other things, to atone for the indulgence, or to cover it from their own observation. How careful is a Pharisee to tithe mint, anise, and cumin, while he neglects the weightier matters of the law! How does he "make

broad his phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of his garment," while he is defective in "judgment, mercy, and faith!" How did the ancient Jews come with thousands of rams, and ten thousand rivers of oil, while living in the habitual neglect of some of the most important branches of the divine law? We have an apposite example of this in the conduct of Saul when sent against Amalek: he spared of the spoil what was good, though he was commanded to destroy it, and then pretended to make a free uncommanded offering of sacrifice unto God, for which he met with this just and severe reprimand: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." We see every day innumerable instances of the same kind: when there is any sin which men are willing to spare, which they defend with arguments, or palliate with excuses, they are so much the more ready to overdo in such duties as are not so contrary to the present current of unsanctified affection. From all this you will plainly see, that no man ought to judge of himself by the greatness of the change in any particular, unless it is universal, and without exception.

SECTION III. From these words, *Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*, and other similar expressions in the holy Scriptures, we may infer that the change here intended is not merely *external and imperfect*, but *inward, essential, and complete.*

I might have divided this observation into two parts, and treated of them separately; first showing that it is not an outward and apparent only, but an internal and real change; secondly, that it is not an imperfect change, or difference in degree only, but a complete and essential change of the whole character. But as the illustration of these two must have necessarily, in a great measure, coincided, and they are very closely connected, I have chosen to join them together.

That what shall be said on this subject may be the more useful and profitable, I will endeavour to explain, in as distinct and simple a manner as I am able, what you are to understand by the above remark. The first part of it will be most easily comprehended, that it is not an external only, but an internal change; that the most apparently strict and regular conversation, the most faultless discharge of outward duties, will not be sufficient while the heart continues enslaved to sin in general, or under the dominion of any particular lust. The other part of the remark is, that the change must not only be imperfect, or in degree, but essential and complete. That is to say, it is not sufficient that a man be somewhat less wicked than before, that he not only gives up some sins, but uses moderation in others;

nay, though he be under some degree of restraint universally, if still there is not what may be called an essential change of character, if still sin has the ascendency upon the whole, though its dominion be not so uncontrolled as before.

Sin may certainly have the chief seat in the affections, though it hath not altogether quiet and peaceable possession. There must always be some governing principle, which, properly speaking, constitutes the character. As our Saviour tell us, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Grace and corruption are opposite in their natures, and mutually destructive of each other, so far as they prevail; and therefore the great question is, not how far any of them is altered from what it was formerly in itself, but how far it prevails in opposition to the other, and hath truly the government of the man. I find it extremely difficult to communicate this truth in a simple and intelligible manner, so as to be level to the meanest capacities. And it is little wonder: for here lies the chief part of the deceitfulness of sin. It will, I hope, be better understood by what is now to be added, both for its proof and illustration.

That what I have above asserted is agreeable to the analogy of faith, and a part of the will of God, may easily be made appear. It is the constant uniform doctrine of the holy Scriptures. There we find it is the peculiar prerogative of God, that he seeth and judgeth the heart. By this his knowledge is distinguished from, and excels all created under-

standing, and therefore, as no appearance will deceive, so no insincere profession will be accepted by him: "For the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." To this purpose is the exhortation of David to his son Solomon: "And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind; for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts."

The stress that is laid on this in Scripture, and the frequent repetition of the word "heart," can hardly have escaped the notice even of the most cursory reader, or the most superficial observer. We find the consent of the heart required, as indispensably and chiefly necessary, and that as distinguished from outward and apparent obedience, which, without it, will be of no value. "My son, give me thine heart," says Solomon, "and let thine eyes observe my ways." We find an inward change of heart and disposition promised by God as the work of his Spirit and grace: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh: and I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." We find the same thing implored by penitent sinners, as necessary to their recovery: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." And we find the duty of returning penitents prescribed in the very same terms: "Cast away from you all your transgressions,

whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

I shall only further observe, that we find in Scripture an integrity of heart required to real religion; that is to say, that the love of God must be the commanding governing principle, that there must be no divided or rival affection suffered to remain: "For the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul." The first duty of the moral law runs in these terms: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind;" which, as a precept of the gospel, is explained by the following passage: "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me." If, to any, the collecting of so many passages of Scripture seems tedious, it is entirely owing to the abundance and commonness of them. It were easy to have added ten times the number to those which have been already quoted, a circumstance to which I particularly beg the reader's attention, as it sets in the strongest light the certainty and importance of this truth.

Having so far confirmed and established the observation from the sacred oracles, I would willingly illustrate and apply it a little more particularly. And as truth seldom receives greater light from any thing than from a discovery of the opposite errors, I shall point out by what means sometimes an apparent or imperfect change is produced, which is not inward

and essential. This I apprehend will be effected by a view of the following characters, every where to be met with. 1. A character founded upon a well-conducted selfish principle. 2. One that is supremely governed by reputation, and a desire of honour and respect from men. 3. One that is influenced by a religious principle, in which a spirit of bondage and slavish fear chiefly predominates.

In the first place, There is a character in the world which may be said to be formed upon a well-conducted selfish principle. It may be said indeed, in general, of every unrenewed person, that in such a heart God is dethroned, and self, in one shape or other, is exalted, is set in his place, and reigns in his stead; but what I have chiefly in view at present is, to point out the character of those who, in all those parts of their conduct which assume the name of religion or of virtue, are chiefly actuated, not by a sense of duty, but by an intention to promote their own present satisfaction and comfort. It is the language of experience and sound reason, as well as of the word of God, "that the wicked worketh a deceitful work." There are many immediate and sensible bad consequences of vice and wickedness. Some who have already smarted under their effects, may, therefore, in many instances avoid them, without any due sense of the evil of sin as against the law of God, or taking his service as their hearty and unfeigned choice.

Let us give some examples of this. A man may avoid intemperance and excess, purely or chiefly because it is hurtful to his health, and introduces such disorders into the frame as incapacitates him for re-

lishing even the pleasures of the world and of sense. A man may find from experience, that being injurious to others in word or in deed, nay, even resenting the injuries done to himself, raises up so many enemies, and so inflames every little incident, as greatly to disturb his peace. He may therefore be patient and forbearing, whilst it is not owing to any meekness of mind, or government of his passions from a sense of duty, but merely to the strength of his judgment, and his falling upon the fittest way of promoting his own ease. It is precisely this sort of men who may often be observed to be reasonable, modest, and self-denied in their deportment in the world in general, but savage and tyrannical, or peevish and discontented in their own families, where there are none upon equal terms with them, or able to make a formidable resistance to them. A wise man may, upon the whole, by reflection discover, that what gives the highest relish and poignancy to every sensible enjoyment is, to habituate himself to some degree of self-denial, to conduct them with decency, and to use them with sobriety and moderation. When this conduct, as indeed is commonly the case, is the fruit of experience, it is so sensible a change, that it often passes itself not only on others, but even on the person concerned, for a religious change. But if the change is not inward as well as outward, if the affections still flow in the same channel, though they are better hemmed in and preserved from impetuosity and excess; if the source of happiness is still the same, though it is more sparingly or more wisely indulged, it is plainly the old nature, and the person cannot be said to be born again. He is outwardly

regular, and comparatively less wicked than before, but cannot be said to love and serve God "with all his heart and with all his soul."

We may learn, from this very important lesson, to distinguish between human virtue and religion, between a decent and blameless carriage upon motives of present conveniency, and a new nature, or a gracious state. I know some are highly dissatisfied at making any distinction of this nature; but is it not plainly possible that such a character as is described above may exist? Is it not also plain, for reasons too obvious to be insisted on, that it cannot deserve the name of a new or spiritual birth? and is it not, therefore, the duty of ministers of the gospel to put men in mind of this, as well as every other source of self-deceit? Nay, the necessity in one view is greatest, in such a case as this, that we may warn those of their danger who have a name to live while they are dead, that we may shake the strong-hold of the presumptuous, self-applauding formalist, who is often more deaf and insensible to the things that belong to his peace, than the most abandoned profligate.

Is there any ready to say, Why do you take upon you to judge the heart, and ascribe what you must confess to be excellent and amiable in itself, to wrong motives and an irreligious principle? I answer, I judge no man's heart; but, while I leave it to the decisive judgment of God, would willingly subject its actings to its own review. It is but an appeal to the inward court of conscience, or rather a citation of the person, with conscience as the witness, to the tribunal of him that "trieth the reins and the

heart." But, after all, there is no difficulty in going a step farther. We may often know the "tree by its fruits." We may often discern the falsehood of these plausible moralists, by an habitual worldliness of temper and conversation, by a great indifference about the ordinances and worship of God; nay, sometimes a bold and avowed opposition to vital experimental religion, to the language and exercises of the spiritual life.

To prevent the misunderstanding of what hath been said, it will be necessary to observe, that I intend not to deny the propriety or the use of these assistant motives, as they may be called, which arise from the present benefit and advantage of true religion. I have said only, that the obedience or reformation which flows from no higher principle, is not such as will be acceptable to God; it is not that change which is necessary before we can enter into life eternal. There are, however, various uses to which these considerations may justly, and ought in duty to be applied. They ought to satisfy us of the excellency and truth of religion in general, and to be produced in opposition to the licentious and profane topics of conversation, so often to be met with in promiscuous company. When any one begins to declaim in favour of lust and sensuality, and alleges that nature has given us desires, and why should it give them but in order to their gratification? let the hearer immediately observe, that by the corruption of nature our appetites are greatly inflamed, and not at all in a sound state; that, as is plain from the most incontested experience, the best and most desirable enjoyment of any sensible delights

is, that thankful, self-denied, moderate use of them, which the word of God authorizes or prescribes.

The same reflections may very properly serve for awakening grosser sinners to a sense of their danger. The prodigal seems to have been first brought to himself, by a deep reflection upon his own folly. But he did not rest here: he did not content himself with endeavouring to recover, by sobriety and industry, the wealth which he had squandered away, but returned to his father for the forgiveness of his crime. In the same manner, no doubt, the loss of health, substance, and reputation, should convince the sinner of the evil of his ways. This argument is used by the apostle Paul: "What fruit had ye then in the things of which ye are now ashamed?" But I would never call that religion which proceeds to no higher views; nor that repentance, which is completed by no better principle.

Such reflections should also be improved by every good man, to impress his mind with a deep sense of the goodness of God. Every thing that he commands is truly most eligible in itself, and most beneficial to us. His will is as gracious, as his authority is absolute. Religion's "ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." Well might our blessed Master say, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls; for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." This should daily dispose us to thankfulness to that God who surrounds us with his care, and who follows us with loving-kindness and with tender mercies. His very restraints are favours, his commands are blessings.

Is it possible to avoid adding, that the same views should be made use of to fortify us against temptation? When a sense of duty is the prevailing desire, we may very safely corroborate it with all these inferior considerations. It should make sin the more hateful and abominable, and prevent us from yielding to that party which still secretly pleads for it in our imperfectly sanctified hearts.

Before I leave this branch of the subject, I must speak a few words to sinners of a different character. If, then, many decent and regular persons are nevertheless under the wrath of God, what terror should this give to the more openly profane, who are living in instances of gross wickedness! How many are there to be found among us, nay, how many appear from Sabbath to Sabbath in our worshipping assemblies, who live in the habitual practice of some of the most notorious crimes! How many, who live in a bold defiance of the truths and laws of our great Master! who are not only stained with original pollution, but labouring under a daily increasing load of actual guilt! Are there not some swearers and blasphemers of the great and dreadful name of God? some despisers and profaners of his holy day? some who add drunkenness to thirst, wasting the creatures of God by dissipating their own substance, defacing the image of God by undermining their own health, at one and the same time procuring and hastening their final destruction? Are there not some walking in the lust of uncleanliness? some retaining, without restitution, the gain of unrighteousness? Is it not surprising that such do not tremble at the word of God? Can there be any doubt that all of the above

characters are unrenewed? Is there any pretence for their deceiving themselves? There is no just excuse even for the more regular and sober building their hope on a false foundation, but there is not so much as a shadow of excuse for them. Dare any such entertain a doubt of a judgment to come? Can any mortal be insensible of the precariousness of time? The king of terrors lays his hands upon one after another, as he receives a commission from the King of kings; and it is distressing to think in what an unprepared state many receive the summons, which nevertheless they must of necessity obey.

Whoever thou art who readest these lines, if thou art yet unrenewed, but particularly, if thou art one of those whose sins are open and manifest, I beseech thee, in the most earnest manner, to be reconciled unto God. "Behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation. God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." The blood of this Saviour is of infinite value. His Spirit is of irresistible efficacy. He is "able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him." Delay not one moment. Give immediate thanks that thou art not already in the place of torment. Believe in the Son of God for righteousness and strength. Add not to all thy other sins against him, by undervaluing his atonement, and despairing of mercy. And may it please God, by his own power, to reach thy heart, to snatch thee as a brand from the burning, and make thee an everlasting monument of his grace and love.

2. In the second place, We may often find an

appearance of religion or virtue in a character, supremely governed by reputation, or a desire of respect and honour from the world. I say supremely governed, because no doubt there may be a mixture of other principles, whilst this is the leading, the directing, and the governing view. I am sensible there are some who have no other view of any kind, by a religious profession, than to deceive others; and, under the fair disguise of piety and seeming devotion, to carry on with more security and success their unrighteous designs. That some such are to be found in the world, sad experience is a melancholy proof. The greatness of their guilt is not easy to conceive, and still more difficult to express. As it must always proceed upon a known deliberate contempt of God, there is usually such a hardness of heart and scaredness of conscience attending it, that there is little probability of making any impression upon them; or rather, to speak more properly, they have all the symptoms of being given up of God and left to themselves. But there is something extremely harsh and unnatural in suspecting any of wilful, deliberate hypocrisy, till it is plainly and openly detected. The truth is, I am persuaded, that as it is a dreadful, so it is a rare character. The far greater part of those who are under the power of hypocrisy, deceive themselves as much as, or rather more than, the world. These last fall more properly in my way to be considered, as having undergone a seeming or apparent, without any real change.

In order to illustrate the character and state of those who are supremely governed by reputation, or a desire of honour and respect, it will be proper to

observe, that as the law of God is a transcript of his own perfect inherent excellence, true religion must be in itself amiable and lovely. Nay, it must appear so even in the eyes of those who are engaged in a stated opposition to its interest. You will say, How is this possible? Is it not a manifest contradiction? I answer, that though the spirit and principles from which true religion must flow, be directly contrary to the bent of an unrenewed heart, yet their effects are both amiable and beneficial. Bad men cannot endure inward mortification and self-denial, being humbled as sinners in the sight of God, justified freely by his grace, sanctified by his Spirit, and having nothing whereof to glory. Against these vital principles of piety, the natural mind sets itself with violence, and the unrenewed heart rises with indignation. But the effect of true religion, or a diligent compliance with the duties of the moral law, as it is amiable in itself, so it is also of good report among men. We are told in Scripture, "that the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour." And the apostle Paul exhorts us to our duty in the following terms: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

Does not this at once discover how many may attain to a considerable degree of regularity in the practice of their duty, while their governing principle is no better than a desire of the esteem of others? That character acquires a value in their eyes which is in general repute, and will set them in the most

favourable light. This hath often a secret and insensible influence, to which they themselves do not attend. What favours the deceit is, that many of the very same duties are commanded in the law of God, and reputable in the sight of man. They gladly embrace them therefore as the service of God; it pleases them to think they shall by this means be acceptable to him. They fondly flatter themselves, that this is the chief ground of their choice, and are not sensible that they are but offering incense to their own vanity. Self-partiality often hides the truth from our view, and conceals the chief springs and motives of action. Since disorder was introduced into the human frame by sin, there is no creature whose character is so mixed, variable, inconsistent, and self-contradictory as man. Other creatures are regular and uniform, and steadily fulfil their functions; their nature and disposition may be known without ambiguity, and they always reach their end. But man is, as it were, torn to pieces by the conflicting principles of light and darkness; and, from the different and contrary symptoms which often appear, it is hard to tell in what class he should be ranged.

From this will evidently appear the necessity of an inward and essential change. That which is done to gain the applause of men, will never be reckoned an acceptable part of the service of God. On the contrary, he holds it in the highest detestation. See the exhortation of our Saviour: "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men to be seen of them, otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven." I cannot help observing here, that

men of this character may be divided into two classes, who commonly state themselves in opposition to, and have the greatest hatred or contempt for, each other, and yet are actuated by one common principle.

There are some who seem chiefly to confine their views to a fair and honourable carriage in their correspondence and commerce between man and man. These are commonly persons of higher rank, and all who desire to emulate them, and wish to be classed with them. In such, honour holds the place of religion, or at least is a superior and more powerful principle. They would not willingly stain their reputation with any thing that is base or mean, according to the standard they have formed to themselves of decency of character and dignity of carriage. This standard of decency, however, is very changeable. It is either more narrow or more extensive, according to the sentiments of those with whom they most frequently converse. And there is often some mixture of religion, which serves under, and co-operates with the commanding motives.

There are vast multitudes of this character in the present age, who cannot be described in juster or more significative terms than those of the apostle Paul: they are "conformed to this world." They tread in its steps, they act upon its maxims, they ask its approbation, and they have their reward.

How far such persons are from being renewed in the spirit of their mind, and how much they are the servants of men, may be plainly discovered by the following sign, That they are almost as much ashamed of unfashionable duties as of dishonourable crimes.

How different is their boasted dignity of mind from a truly holy resolution, and Christian magnanimity! Are there not some whose integrity, in ordinary cases, may be depended on, and who would abhor the thoughts of a mean and dirty action, as it is usually styled, but who would be covered with nearly equal shame, if surprised in any act of devotion, as if detected in dishonesty and fraud? How many, who would brave the king of terrors in the field of battle, from a sense of honour, but who, though far from being infidels, have not sufficient courage to worship in their families the great Creator and Preserver of men?—Such may see the reception they shall meet with at last, and even feel the justice of their own condemnation, in these words of our Saviour: "Whosoever, therefore, shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels."

There are others of a different stamp, who seek the approbation of men, more by an appearance of piety and devotion, and the duties of the first table of the law. That there are some such also, not only the word of God, but daily experience, puts beyond all doubt or question. "This people," saith our Lord, "draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." I set aside, both in this and in the former instance, the case of gross, intended, and deliberate hypocrisy. But are there not many who, in their religious duties, seem chiefly to have in view the attaining or preserving the esteem and approba-

tion of others? They are not determined from any inward and personal conviction of the excellence or necessity of religion, but from their youth up they have still heard religion spoken of with reverence, and seen religious persons treated with respect. This makes them consider an entire neglect of religious duties as shameful rather than sinful; and some degree of professed attachment to them, as necessary to their character and credit.

This, like many other motives, has a strong, though at the same time an insensible influence, and, when mixed with imperfect convictions of sin, will produce no small degree of regularity in religious exercises, while yet the heart is habitually set upon the world. In whatever age or place there is a regular and settled administration of the ordinances of Christ, there will be many whose religion is no more than a blind imitation of others, and a desire of some title to that character which is in esteem and repute for the time being. Wherever there is much real, there will also be much counterfeit religion. Wherever there is much true piety, it is always loaded with the dead weight of many customary professors. Wherever there is much outward esteem waiting upon the servants of God, there will always be many of these fair-weather Christians, who follow Christ whilst the profession is honourable, but are unacquainted with that part of his service, which consists in taking up the cross and suffering reproach. Their character is well described by our Saviour, under the image of seed falling upon stony places: "He that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth

it: yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended."

3. In the third place, There is still another character different from both the former, in which there may be an apparent and imperfect, while there is no complete and essential change. The character I have now in view is formed upon religious principles, but in which a spirit of bondage and slavish fear greatly predominates. It is often difficult, according to the Scripture expression, rightly to divide the word of truth: it is difficult to point out the errors by which men deceive themselves, and mistake the shadow for the substance, and at the same time to caution them so distinctly, as that serious persons may not be alarmed, their peace and comfort interrupted by unnecessary or ill-grounded fears. Perhaps there are few subjects in which this difficulty is greater, than the one I have now mentioned. I pray that God, for Christ's sake, may enable me to open the truth in such a manner, as may convince and awaken those who have hitherto built with untempered mortar, and may give additional peace and consolation to those who have "fled for refuge, to lay hold of the hope set before them."

That it is of importance to open this character, every one may, upon a little reflection, be sensible. There are many who will not find themselves included in any of the two former. Upon the most candid examination, conscience bears them witness, that they have more in view than merely present ease and comfort, or the approbation of others. They have often a strong impression of the importance of an endless

eternity. This hath a sensible and considerable influence upon their conduct, and is a motive quite distinct from worldly pleasure. It compels them to duties out of the reach of human observation, and therefore they cannot think that the praise of men is their highest aim.

But are there not many such under the dominion of fear? that is to say, conscience in some measure awakened, denounces vengeance against the breaches of the law of God; providential dispensations fill them with a terror of divine power; they know they cannot live always, and tremble to think what shall become of them after death. Well, perhaps the reader will say, with some surprise, is this wrong? No, so far their exercise coincides with that of real penitents. But here, if I may so express it, the ways part asunder: the real penitent, by a discovery of the intrinsic evil of sin, of the mercy of God, and the great foundation of a sinner's hope, is led in the way of peace; his heart is truly changed, and brought under the influence of the love of God, whom he obeys as his lawgiver, to whom he submits as his Lord, and in whom he rests as his portion. But there are others who, by abstinence from some sins against which the reproofs of conscience are most distinct and severe, and by the formal discharge of many religious duties, endeavour to lessen their fears, to lay a foundation for a precarious peace, and, as it were, by a costly sacrifice to purchase an immunity from hell. Fear not only awakens, but continues to govern them; they lay down a legal system of obedience and self-righteousness, but all the while they drag the yoke with great impatience. They do not

hate sin from their hearts, on its own account, but are afraid that they shall burn for ever for committing it. They do not love God, but they fear, because they know that they cannot resist him. They do not engage in his service with cheerfulness, or delight in it as their choice, but groan under it as a burden. Their hearts and affections are set upon present and temporal enjoyments; but they apply themselves in some measure to the duties of religion, because they know they cannot keep the world always, and submit to it as rather better and more tolerable than everlasting misery.

The frequency of this character will stand in need of little proof. If the features are justly drawn, I am persuaded they will be easily known, for they are very common. Are there not many who may justly suspect themselves to be actuated by no higher motive than the fear of wrath? Does not this plainly show itself, by your backward, heartless, cold discharge of duty, your regret and sorrow in parting with, and frequent relapses into sin? Is not your religion temporary and changeable? Does it not rise and fall with the sensible tokens of the divine presence and power? Have you not trembled on a sick-bed or other time of danger—humbled yourselves before God—cried for relief—and promised amendment? But has not your resolution relaxed upon your recovery, and your diligence borne proportion to the supposed nearness or distance of the danger? Is not this then manifestly the effect of fear? and may not the words of the Psalmist be justly applied to all such? "When he slew them, then they sought him; and they returned and in-

quired early after God: and they remembered that God was their Rock, and the high God their Redeemer. Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues: for their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant."

Few things, I apprehend, will be of more importance than to show, in a clear and satisfying manner, that the obedience or religious performances that are influenced by no higher motive than fear, are not acceptable to God, nor any sufficient evidence of a renewed heart. This indeed is equally plain from many passages of Scripture, and from the nature and reason of the thing. It appears from all those passages formerly cited, and many others where mention is made of the inclination of the heart and will, of which obedience on compulsion can be no manner of proof. It appears undeniably from the great commandment of the law, and sum of practical religion, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind." It appears from what is always represented as the great commanding and constraining motive of the gospel: "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them, and rose again." To the same purpose the apostle John says, "We have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him." We find in Scripture, that there

is a direct opposition stated between the spirit of genuine converts under the gospel, and a spirit of bondage or slavish fear: "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." So says the same apostle to Timothy, "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

The truth is, it is equally plain from the nature and reason of the thing. That which is done only or chiefly from fear, cannot be any evidence of the change that is acceptable to God, because, properly speaking, it is no real or inward change at all. The effects of sin are restrained or controlled by superior power, but the inclination to it remains still the same. It is a common and known principle, that whatever is the effect of compulsion or force upon the agent, whether it be good or evil in itself, hath nothing moral in its nature. The sword that commits murder, and that which executes justice, deserves equal blame or praise, or rather none of them deserves either the one or the other. A detected thief, compelled to make restitution, or loaded with chains so that he cannot steal, does not thereby become honest in his nature.

The case is precisely the same with those who, in their religious duties, are under the government of fear, although it be the fear of their almighty Judge. From any similar instance between man and man, we may at once be sensible of this truth. If one man is willing to over-reach another, but, through his adversary's superior skill, is not able, or, terrified by threatenings, is not bold enough to attempt it, what

character does he bear, or deserve, but that of a disappointed knave? What parent or master will be satisfied with the obedience of a child or servant, who plainly discovers that he hates his commands and grieves at his authority? It is true, as man can only judge with certainty of the outward appearance, this circumstance must be left out of every system of human government. We can make no laws on earth to punish the intention; but so much we know of it, as may make us sensible what all such deserve, and shall receive at the hand of God, whose prerogative it is that he knoweth and judgeth the secrets of all hearts.

I shall only further observe, that the same thing appears in the clearest manner, from the nature of that happiness which is prepared for the children of God in the life to come. It is purely spiritual, as it is perfectly holy; it consists in the knowledge of God, in the exercise of love to him, in conformity to his nature, and the execution of his will. Those who are under the dominion of fear, who have no love to God, but only desire to avoid his wrath, will certainly find, that though it were possible for them to escape hell, they neither deserve, nor are able to relish the employment and happiness of heaven. As the commands of God are a burden to them on earth, his immediate presence would be a still more insupportable burden in heaven. From all this I hope it appears evidently, that a character may be formed upon religious principles, and yet, if it is never carried further than a restraint by fear, it is not that change which is necessary to salvation.

It will not be improper, or rather it will be abso-

lutely necessary, to make a reflection or two upon this branch of the subject for its improvement, and to prevent its being mistaken or misapplied. For this purpose let it be observed, that we must carefully distinguish the slavish dread above explained, from that dutiful reverential fear which every child of God is still bound to preserve upon his mind, of his Father who is in heaven. Of the first kind it is said, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love." In proportion as the love of God prevails, the first sort of fear is banished, but the other is so far from being banished, that it rather increases. This is no other than a profound veneration of the unspeakable greatness and glory of God, and particularly of his holiness and purity, which should bring every creature prostrate before him. We find, in the vision of Isaiah, the heavenly hosts represented as deeply penetrated with such a discovery: "In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."

This not only may, but ought in us to be accompanied with a fear of the punishment incurred by sin; at the same time it must be inseparably connected with, or rather founded upon, a sense of the holiness of his nature, the purity of his law, and the justice of his vengeance. On the contrary, that fear

of God which prevails in the unregenerate, is founded only on the terror of his power, as a natural attribute. It is like the struggling of a chained slave, who "gnaws his tongue for pain;" who is not satisfied with the equity of the law which he has transgressed, and cannot admit the justice of that sentence the execution of which he apprehends.

There is no inconsistency at all between the fear and love which terminate on the correspondent attributes of God, majesty and mercy. A Christian may, and ought to grow in a sense of the divine presence, and reverential dread of the divine majesty, and so be still more afraid of sinning: at the same time he may also grow in a sweet calm and composure of mind, as a fiducial trust and reliance on the divine faithfulness and mercy; just as, on the other hand, some sinners evidently increase both in presumption and timidity. During a great part of their lives, they act without reflection and without restraint, and yet, at particular seasons, they are in a manner distracted with terror: nay, though it often happens that gross wickedness sears the conscience, and produces an insensibility and hardness of heart, there are instances of the greatest profligates being liable to the most alarming fears.* Let us never, therefore, confound things so very opposite as a fear of the living God, joined to an inward and hearty approbation of his commands, and that unwilling obedience or abstinence which views him as

* We are told that Nero, one of those monsters called Roman emperors, though he adventured to perpetrate some of the most horrid crimes, was yet so easily terrified, that a thunder-storm used to make him hide himself under a bed.

a stern tyrant, and trembles at the thoughts of his wrath.

It will be further necessary to observe, that, as a slavish fear is to be entirely distinguished from that which is filial and dutiful, so no doubt there is often, even in real Christians, a mixture of the spirit of bondage itself, though they are supremely governed by a better principle. This is not to be wondered at, since they are sanctified but in part. There is a strong remainder of sin and corruption in them of different kinds, and, among the rest, a very blameable degree of unbelief and distrust. How many are there whose comfort is lessened, and whose hands hang down, through an excessive fear of death, the last enemy! What a refreshment should it be to all such to think of this end of our Saviour's coming, to "deliver them who, through fear of death, were all their life-time subject unto bondage!" For their sakes, I am persuaded, it will not be disagreeable that, in the close of this section, I lay down a few marks, by which they may be enabled to judge whether this slavish fear predominates or not.

1. First then, Christians, whether or not is your fear of wrath immediately connected with a sense of the evil of sin? Do you see these two things in their inseparable relation to, and mutual influence upon one another? Do you fear wrath as the effect of sin, and sin as the just cause of wrath? Have you no fault to find with this connection? Do you plead guilty before God, and confess that you are without excuse? Is sin truly hateful in itself, and your own unhappy proneness to it an habitual burden? The language of a believer is the same with that of the

apostle Paul: "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin." In those who are under the dominion of fear, there is no just sense of the evil of sin, there is a proneness to extenuate it, and inclination to justify it, and a continual attempt to forget or conceal it. The crime is still sweet, though the punishment is terrible. They are not satisfied to find that God is so holy, so just, and so powerful. With them his government is arbitrary, his law is severe, his nature implacable; and, instead of changing their own disposition, they would much rather wish a change in his will.

2. Whether does your fear of God drive you from his presence, or excite a strong desire of reconciliation and peace? The slavish fear which is not attended with any just views of the divine mercy, clothes God with terror, and makes him the object of aversion. This is plainly the first effect of sin. It was so in the case of Adam, who, as soon as he had lost his integrity, when he heard God's voice in the garden, fled and hid himself. We find the same sentiment expressed by the men of Bethshemesh, upon an extraordinary token of divine power and jealousy: "And the men of Bethshemesh said, Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God? and to whom shall he go up from us?" Nay, the same seems to have been the view of the apostle Peter,

when surprised with an astonishing evidence of his Master's power and Godhead: "When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' feet, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

This disposition is daily manifest in many who are under the dominion of fear. The worship of God is painful to them, his service is a burden, his presence is terrible; they keep at a distance, therefore, as much as they can or dare. Their peace and composure is chiefly owing to their losing themselves, and occupying their minds entirely with different objects. No sign will more surely discover the nature and influence of slavish fear than this. There is a gloom and melancholy spread over every thing in religion to them: when they are engaged in sacred duties, it is a heavy tiresome task, and they rejoice in getting them over, as a bullock when he is loosed from the yoke. On the other hand, real Christians, though burdened with sinful fear, cannot take refuge in any thing else than God; they dare not take their rest in the creature, but say with Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him;" or with the Psalmist David, "Yet the Lord will command his loving-kindness in the day-time, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life." Nothing gives relief to such, till they attain to a view of the divine mercy, and an humble hope of peace and reconciliation.

3. Whether have you comfort and satisfaction in a sense of God's favour, as well as a distressing fear of his wrath? This also will serve to distinguish between those who have no other religion than what fear produces, and those in whom it only maintains a

conflict with a better principle. There are some who are restrained from sin, and compelled to many duties by fear, who may easily see what governs them, because they are altogether strangers to joy and satisfaction in God. This is not indeed what they aim at. They have never yet seen his favour as the object of supreme desire. They only believe so far as to tremble, and would fain, by composition, so to speak, and some degree of compliance, though reluctant and backward, avoid the divine wrath. A coldness and constraint runs through all their performances, and they are apt to call in question the reality of joy in God, and communion with him, because they are altogether strangers to it themselves. But all the real children of God desire a sense of his love, as well as grieve or fear under a sense of his displeasure. The light of his reconciled countenance gives them more joy and gladness than the greatest affluence of corn or of wine; and, under the severest chastisement, instead of flying from his presence, they say with Job, "O that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments." Nothing indeed can be more proper than calling the one a filial, and the other a slavish fear; for great is the difference between a child fearing the displeasure of a parent whom he sincerely loves, and a slave dreading the resentment of an enraged tyrant whose service he abhors.

SECTION IV. From this metaphor, *Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*, and other parallel expressions in the Holy Scriptures, we may learn that the change here intended is SUPERNATURAL.

When I say it is a supernatural change, I mean that it is what man cannot by his own power effect, without superior or divine aid. As we are by nature in a state of enmity and opposition to God, so this is what we cannot "of ourselves" remove or overcome. The exercise of our own rational powers, the persuasion of others, the application of all moral motives of every kind, will be ineffectual without the special operation of the Spirit and grace of God. Thus the apostle John describes those who believe in the name of Christ: "Which were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." And thus the apostle Paul expresses himself: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." There is no part of the Scripture doctrine which the natural man hears with greater aversion, or opposes with greater violence. It gives so humbling a view of our own character and state, and stands so directly opposed to pride and self-sufficiency, that it cannot be truly acceptable to any, till they are brought to a saving acquaintance with its power and efficacy. However, it hath been this "foolishness of preaching," or rather, this commonly esteemed foolish part of preaching, that God hath

most remarkably blessed for the salvation of souls. I will therefore endeavour to show, in as plain and satisfying a manner as I am able, that this is the doctrine of the Holy Scripture, and then to vindicate it from the chief objections that are usually raised against it.

How many passages of Scripture are there, that speak, in the strongest terms, not only of our miserable, but helpless state before conversion! Thus the apostle to the Ephesians, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." And again, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ; (by grace ye are saved)." In his Epistle to the Colossians he repeats the same thing: "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses." The reader must know, that in many other passages the same truth is to be found, couched under the same or like metaphors; such as, "blindness, darkness, hardness of heart." The force of the expression is seldom sufficiently attended to. Suffer me then to put the question, Do you give credit to the Holy Scriptures? Do you form your opinions, without partiality or prejudice, from them? Then you must receive it as truth, that man, in his natural state, can do nothing of himself to his own recovery, without the concurrence of superior aid. If there is any meaning or propriety in Scripture language, we must yield to this. What more could be said, than that we are "dead" in sin? What more incapable of action than one who is entirely deprived of life?

But lest there should be any remaining exception, the thing is asserted in plain and explicit terms, without any metaphor, by the apostle John, from our Saviour's own mouth: "No man can come unto me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man, therefore, that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." I shall mention only one passage more, in which, under the similitude of a wretched outcast infant, the prophet Ezekiel represents the natural state of Jerusalem: "And as for thy nativity, in the day thou wast born thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed in water to supple thee; thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all. None eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field, to the loathing of thy person, in the day that thou wast born. And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee, when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee, when thou wast in thy blood, Live." Here all the circumstances are collected that could signify at once a miserable and weak, wretched and helpless condition, or that could serve to make our deliverance at once a signal instance both of grace and power.

This leads me to observe, that the same truth will receive further light from those passages of Scripture in which the real agent in this great change is pointed out, and which celebrate the efficacy of his power. As in the text it is asserted, that "except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the king-

dom of God," so, in other passages, true believers are said to be "born of God—born from above—born of the Spirit." The power of God exerted in the renovation of the sinner, is described in language taken from the first formation of the world: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." And, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." See the prophecies of the Old Testament, respecting the plentiful effusion of the Holy Spirit in the times of the gospel; they contain a clear description of divine, supernatural influence. Thus the prophet Isaiah, "For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground. I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring; and they shall spring up as among the grass, and as willows by the water-courses." To the same purpose the prophet Ezekiel, "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh: and I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes; and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." Let it not seem tedious to any that I have collected so many passages of Scripture on this subject. It is no light thing, and indeed it is no common thing, to believe it from the heart. But

let us now affirm it, on divine testimony, that regeneration is the work of the Holy Ghost.

I would not build this truth upon any other evidence. When we stand in God's room, bear his message, and speak in his name, nothing should be affirmed which cannot be supported by a "Thus saith the Lord." But having done so, I think I may warrantably observe how much the visible state of the world corresponds with the Scripture declarations on this subject. I hope this will be neither unsuitable nor unprofitable, considering what an inward aversion men have to receive and apply them. Do we not daily see many instances of persons, of first-rate understandings and great natural abilities, who yet continue blind to their duty to God, and the salvation of their souls? As they are born, so they continue to show themselves through their whole lives, "wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge." What proofs do they often give of the power and influence of habits of wickedness over them! How frequently does it happen, that their attachment to sin in general, or to some particular sin, is such as to bear down before it all regard to their own interest, temporal and eternal! while at the same time persons of unspeakably inferior talents, enlightened by the Spirit, and sanctified by the grace of God, shall stand firm against the most dangerous temptations, and escape the pollution that is in the world through lust. This our blessed Lord adores as a part or proof of the sovereignty and unsearchable wisdom of his heavenly Father: "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid

these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes; even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight."

Is it not plain that superior advantages of instruction, though very valuable, are far from being always effectual? Sometimes those who live long under the salutary instruction, and edifying example of pious parents and masters, continue, notwithstanding, in an insensible state. Sometimes we see persons sit long under the most enlightened and awakening ministry, with hearts as hard as the nether millstone. The case of the ordinary hearers of the gospel is indeed often affecting, and leads to serious meditation on the depths of the divine counsels. Suffer me to bespeak the readers of this class in the following terms:—Are not many of you a wonder to yourselves, as well as to one another? Is not your danger often pointed out to you in the clearest manner? Is not your character drawn and distinguished by the most undeniable marks? Are not your duty and interest set before you in such a manner that it cannot be contradicted, and there is nothing left to reply? And yet after all, though there may be some weak and temporary resolutions, it is without any real or lasting effect. Doth not this ratify and confirm the following passage of Scripture? "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then, neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth, but God that giveth the increase."

To be absent altogether from the ordinances of

God, is a dreadful and dangerous thing, for it leads directly to a state of total blindness and undisturbed security. I have often thought, however, that the case of many who continue to give their attendance is much more wonderful. Are there not habitual drunkards often seen in the house of God? Are there not some profane swearers often seen in the house of God? Are there not some who walk in the lust of uncleanness? some who retain, without restitution, unrighteous gain, whom approaching death, the wrath of God, and the fire of hell, cannot terrify? Of such we may justly say with the apostle Paul, "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

Let it be further considered, how much providential warnings are generally despised, even when they are so awful in their nature, and so clear in their meaning, that one would think nothing but an absolute infatuation could prevent their effect. Sinners may keep themselves from hearing the word of God, and from any such reading or conversation as will bring eternity in their view. But he visits them in their families or in their persons, and they cannot fly from those "terrible things in righteousness," by which he pleads his cause from day to day. Are not the young and beautiful soon carried to their graves? Are not the great and noble soon humbled in the dust? Have not sensuality and riot, impurity and lust, slain their victims, and raised up monuments fraught with moral instruction in every age? How

long is it ago since Hosea said, "Whoredom, and wine, and new wine, take away the heart?" and since Solomon said of a harlot, "She hath cast down many wounded, and many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death?" But though uninspired writers have said this as well as he, nay, though it is visible to all, have men become wise? have they shunned the paths of the destroyer? No; we may justly say of the present times, as the Psalmist David said many ages ago, "This their way is their folly; yet their posterity approve their sayings." Nothing, nothing will change them, till the Spirit of God rouse and awaken the conscience, powerfully constrain the will, and effectually renew the heart.

Hence then it appears, that the new birth is a "supernatural change:" it is the effect of the power of God; it is the work of the Holy Ghost. I have been at the more pains to establish this truth, because I am persuaded, that, until it be truly received, there may be a form, but there can be nothing of the power of godliness. But we must now vindicate it from the objections and abuse to which it may be thought liable. There are many who still harbour in their minds, and sometimes produce in conversation, the objection mentioned by the apostle Paul: "Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault, for who hath resisted his will?" This indeed is the sum of all the objections that ever were, or ever can be offered against it; and I make the short answer of the same apostle, "Nay, but O man! who art thou that repliest against God?" This is

but making or imagining an inconsistency between two things, both of which God hath clearly established, and inseparably joined in his word. These are, his own power necessary to the change, and our duty in the use of the means; or rather, our sin while continuing at enmity with him, and refusing his mercy.

I make no scruple to acknowledge, that it is impossible for me, nay, I find no difficulty in supposing that it is impossible for any finite mind, to point out the bounds between the "dependence" and "activity" of the creature. But though we must ever remember, that it is he alone who can "bring a clean thing out of an unclean," yet we know also, that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." We know that "God will be just when he speaketh, and clear when he judgeth:" that he rejects with disdain the imputation of being the author of sin. "Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any man." For our greater assurance of this, he hath condescended to confirm it by his oath—"As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" The connection between this and the former truth appears plainly in the following passage: "Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life."

Perhaps, also, there are some who abuse this doctrine to sloth and negligence. At least they may pretend this as an excuse or palliation of their

contempt of religion. But is it not an inference directly contrary to what the Scripture teaches us much more justly to draw from the same truth, namely, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure?" The former inference would be just in the case of devils, who, having received their sentence, can only now "believe and tremble;" but it would be altogether unjust, and a dreadful contempt of mercy in those to whom the offer of salvation by grace is addressed. What is now transacting in the ministry of the gospel, shall contribute at last to stop every mouth, and put this criminal excuse to eternal silence. Suppose the sinner at the judgment-seat to offer this defence for himself: 'I was altogether under the power of corruption; it was impossible for me to do any thing of myself.' Is it not natural to reply, 'Where learned you this?' 'From the holy Scriptures.' 'And did not the same Scriptures also tell you, "Him that cometh to me I will in nowise cast out. Wherefore he is able to save to the uttermost all that come to God through him. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved?"' 'But I could not reconcile one Scripture to another.' 'And was that any way wonderful? Or can it possibly justify your rebellion against the plainest commands, that you were not able fully to comprehend what is said of the absolute dominion and sovereignty of God?'

Let us, therefore, settle it in our minds, That, though we are of ourselves utterly unable to produce a change in our hearts, "nothing is impossible with

God." He first made them, and he is able to reform them. On a conviction of our own inability, one would think we should but the more humbly and the more earnestly apply to him who is all-sufficient in power and grace. The deplorable and naturally helpless state of sinners, doth not hinder exhortations to them in Scripture; and therefore takes not away their obligation to duty. See an address, where the strongest metaphors are retained, the exhortation given in these very terms, and the foundation of the duty plainly pointed out—"Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." From which it is very plain, that the moral inability under which sinners now lie, as a consequence of the fall, is not of such a nature as to take away the guilt of sin, the propriety of exhortations to duty, or the necessity of endeavours after recovery.

But what shall we say? Alas! the very subject we are now speaking of, affords a new proof of the blindness, prejudice, and obstinacy of sinners. They are self-condemned; for they do not act the same part in similar cases. The affairs of the present life are not managed in so preposterous a manner. He that ploughs his ground, and throws in his seed, cannot so much as unite one grain to the clod; nay, he is not able to conceive how it is done. He cannot carry on, nay, he cannot so much as begin one single step of this wonderful process toward the subsequent crop; the mortification of the seed, the resurrection of the blade, and gradual increase, till it come to perfect maturity. Is it, therefore, reasonable that he should say, 'I for my part can do no-

thing; it is, first and last, an effect of divine power and energy; and God can as easily raise a crop without sowing as with it, in a single instant and in any place, as in a long time by the mutual influence of soil and season: I will therefore spare myself the hardship of toil and labour, and wait with patience till I see what he will be pleased to send?' Would this be madness? Would it be universally reputed so? And would it not be equal madness to turn the grace of God into licentiousness? Believe it, the warning is equally reasonable and equally necessary, in spiritual as in temporal things: "Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

CHAPTER II.

Wherein this change doth properly and directly consist, and what are its principal evidences and fruits.

Section I. Wherein the change in regeneration doth properly and directly consist.

I have hitherto, by general remarks, endeavoured to caution the reader against taking up with erroneous and defective views of the nature of religion. We now proceed a step farther: and I would willingly point out, in as distinct a manner as I am able, what is the change which is wrought in all, without exception, who are the real children of God, by whatever means it is brought about; what it is in the temper and disposition, in the life and practice, which constitutes the difference between one who "is," and one who is "not born again." The different steps by which this change may be effected in the sovereign providence of God, and the different degrees of perfection at which it may arrive, I purposely omit here, and reserve as the subject of a distinct head of discourse.

That we may enter on the subject with the greater perspicuity and simplicity, it will be proper to begin with observing, that the design and purpose of this change is to repair the loss which man sustained by the fall. Man, at his first creation, was made after the image of God, in knowledge, righteousness, and

holiness, and enjoyed uninterrupted fellowship and communion with him. He was not only subservient to the divine glory, by a natural and necessary subjection to the divine dominion, which all creatures are, have been, and ever will be, but by choice and inclination, his duty and delight being invariably the same. By the fall he became not only obnoxious to the divine displeasure, by a single act of transgression, but disobedient to the divine will in his habitual and prevailing inclination. This is the character given, not of one man only, but of the human race: "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

He became, at the same time, not only unworthy of, but wholly disinclined to, communion with God, and habitually disposed to prefer the creature before the Creator, who is "God blessed for evermore." In regeneration, therefore, the sinner must be restored to the image of God, which, in a created nature, is but another expression for obedience to his will. He must also be restored to the exercise of love to him, and find his happiness and comfort in him. His habitual temper, his prevailing disposition, or that which hath the ascendency, must be the same that was perfect and without mixture before the fall, and shall be made equally, or perhaps more perfect in heaven, after death.

As the change must be entire and universal, corresponding to the corruption of the whole man, it is not unusual to say it may be fully comprehended in the three following things, giving a new direction to the understanding, the will, and the affections. And

no doubt, with respect to every one of these, there is a remarkable and sensible change. But as the understanding is a natural faculty, which becomes good or evil just as it is applied or employed, it would be scarce possible to illustrate the change in it without introducing, at the same time, a view of the disposition and tendency of the heart and affections. As, therefore, the change is properly of a moral or spiritual nature, it seems to me properly and directly to consist in these two things: 1. That our supreme and chief end be to serve and glorify God, and that every other aim be subordinate to this. 2. That the soul rest in God as its chief happiness, and habitually prefer his favour to every other enjoyment. These two particulars I shall now endeavour to illustrate a little, in the order in which I have named them.

1. Our supreme and chief end must be to serve and glorify God, and every other aim must be subordinate to this.

All things were originally made, and are daily preserved for, nay, they shall certainly in the issue tend to, the glory of God; that is, the exercise and illustration of divine perfection. With this great end of creation, the inclination and will of every intelligent creature ought to coincide. It is, according to Scripture and reason, the first duty of man to "give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name." This, I know, the world that lieth in wickedness can neither understand nor approve. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

The truth is, we ought not to be surprised to find it so, for in this the sin of man originally consisted, and in this the nature of all sin, as such, doth still consist, namely, withdrawing the allegiance due to God, and refusing subjection to his will. The language of every unrenewed heart, and the language of every sinner's practice is, 'Our lips are our own, who is lord over us?' But he that is renewed and born again, hath seen his own entire dependence upon God, hath seen his Maker's right of dominion, and the obligation upon all his creatures to be, in every respect, subservient to his glory, and, without reserve, submissive to his will. He hath seen this to be most fit and reasonable, because of the absolute perfection, and infinite excellence of the divine nature. He is convinced, that all preferring of our will to that of God, is a criminal usurpation by the creature, of the unalienable rights of the great Creator and sovereign Proprietor of all.

Regeneration, then, is communicating this new principle, and giving it such force as that it may obtain and preserve the ascendency, and habitually govern the will. Every one may easily see the different operation and effects of this principle and its opposite, by the different carriage and behaviour of men in the world. The unrenewed man seeks his own happiness immediately and ultimately; it is to please himself that he constantly aims. This is the cause, the uniform cause, of his preferring one action to another. This determines his choice of employments, enjoyments, companions. His religious actions are not chosen, but submitted to, through fear of worse. He considers religion as a

restraint, and the divine law as hard and severe. So that a short and summary description may be given of man in his natural state—That he hath forgotten his subjection, that God is dethroned, and self honoured, loved, and served in his room.

This account will appear to be just, from every view given us in Scripture of our state and character, before or after conversion. It appears very clearly, from the first condition required by our Saviour of his disciples, namely, self-denial. "Then said Jesus to his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." All those who are brought back to a sense of their duty and obligation as creatures, are ready to say, not with their tongues only, but with their hearts, "Thou art worthy to receive glory, and honour, and power, for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." It ought to be attended to, what is the import of this when spoken from conviction. They not only consider God as being most great, and therefore to be feared; but as infinitely holy, as absolutely perfect, and therefore to be loved and served. They esteem all his commands concerning all things to be right. Their own remaining corruption is known, felt, and confessed to be wrong. This law in their members, warring against the law of God in their minds, is often deeply lamented, and, by the grace of God, strenuously and habitually resisted.

Perhaps the attentive reader may have observed, that I have still kept out of view our own great interest in the service of God. The reason is, there is certainly, in every renewed heart, a sense of duty,

independent of interest. Were this not the case, even supposing a desire of reward or fear of punishment should dispose to obedience, it would plainly be only a change of life, and no change of heart. At the same time, as it did not arise from any inward principle, it would neither be uniform nor lasting. It is beyond all question, indeed, that our true interest is inseparable from our duty, so that self-seeking is self-losing; but still a sense of duty must have the precedency, otherwise it changes its nature, and is, properly speaking, no duty at all.

To honour God in the heart, then, and to serve him in the life, is the first and highest desire of him that is born again. This is not, and cannot be the case, with any in a natural state. But, before we proceed to the other particular implied in this change, it will not be improper to make an observation, which I hope will have the greater weight when the foundation of it is fresh in the reader's mind. Hence may be plainly seen the reason why profane and worldly men have such a tendency to self-righteousness, while the truly pious are filled with an abhorrence of that soul-destroying falsehood. This, I dare say, appears strange to many, as I confess it hath often done to me, before I had thought fully upon the subject: that those who are evidently none of the strictest in point of morals, and have least of that kind to boast of, should yet be the most professed admirers and defenders of the doctrine of justification by works, and despisers of the doctrine of the grace of God. But the solution is easy and natural. Worldly men have no just sense of their natural and unalienable obligation to glorify God in

their thoughts, words, and actions, and therefore all that they do in religion, they look upon as a meritorious service, and think that certainly something is due to them on that account. They think it strange, if they have walked soberly, regularly, and decently, especially if they have been strict and punctual in the forms of divine worship, that God should not be obliged (pardon the expression) to reward them according to their works. It is a hard service to them, they do it only that they may be rewarded, or at least may not suffer for the neglect of it, and therefore cannot but insist upon the merit of it.

On the other hand, those who are born of God are sensible that it is the duty of every rational creature to love God with all his heart, and to consecrate all his powers and faculties to his Maker's service. They are convinced, that whoever should do so without sin, would do only what is just and equal, and have no plea of merit to advance. But when they consider how many sins still cleave to them, how far short they come of their duty in every instance, they ask for mercy, and not for reward, and are ready to say with the Psalmist David, "If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." To sum up this reasoning in a few words—The reluctant obedience which some pay to the divine law, is considered as a debt charged upon God, whereas real obedience is considered as a debt due to God. And therefore it must always hold, that the very imperfection of an obedience itself, increases our disposition to overvalue and rest our dependence upon it.

Section II. The second part of this change.

The next thing implied in a saving change is, that that soul rests in God as its chief happiness, and habitually prefers his favour to every other enjoyment. On this branch of the subject I would beg the reader to observe, not only the meaning and substance of the proposition, but the order in which it is placed. There must be first a devotedness of mind to God, and a supreme leading concern for his honour and glory. He must be, if I may so speak, again restored to his original right, his dominion and throne, while the creature is reduced to its obedience and subjection. In consequence of this, there is an unfeigned acquiescence in God, as the source of comfort, and a high esteem of his favour as better than life. This does not go before, nay, is hardly distinct or separated from a sense of duty, but is founded upon it, and grows out of it. When a holy soul has seen the infinite excellence and glory of the true God, loves him supremely, and is devoted to him entirely, he also delights in him superlatively.

Such a person is fully convinced that those, and those alone are happy, whose God is the Lord, and that those who are afar off from him shall certainly perish. In a natural state, as the sure consequence of sin, the transgressor flies from God, with a dread and horror of his presence. But the renewed soul returns to him with desire, and feels an uneasiness and want that cannot be supplied but by the intimation of pardon, and sense of divine love. The warmth and fervour of devout affection is expressed

in the strongest terms in Scripture: "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?" "Because thy loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips."

It is necessary that serving and delighting in God should be joined together on a double account. Their influence on one another is reciprocal. It is not easy to distinguish a conscientious study to serve and glorify God, from a slavish obedience through fear of divine power, but by its being inseparably connected with a delight in God, as the choice of the heart and centre of the affections. On the other hand, it is hard to distinguish cleaving to God as our portion and happiness, from an interested, mercenary bargain in religion, but by its being preceded by, founded upon, nay, even resolved into, a sense of the supreme honour due to God for his infinite excellence. This reasonable service will then be attended with an unspeakable sweetness and complacency, and the all-sufficiency of God will be an unshaken security for the happiness and peace of those who put their trust in him.

We may often observe these two dispositions jointly exerting themselves, and mutually strengthening one another, in the language and exercises of the saints in Scripture. With what fervour of spirit, and with what inimitable force and beauty of style,

do we find the Psalmist David expressing himself in both views! Sometimes he makes a full surrender of himself and his all to the divine service and disposal; at other times his soul "makes her boast in God," and he exults in his happiness and security under the divine protection: "O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord.—The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage."

These two things are, indeed, often so intimately united, that we are at a loss to know whether we should interpret the language of the sacred writers as a profession of duty, or an expression of delight, as in the following words: "I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. My meditation of him shall be sweet; I will be glad in the Lord." How deeply the Psalmist was penetrated with a sense of the honour and service due to God, may be particularly seen in some of those animated passages in which his enlarged heart calls upon every creature to join in the work of praise: "Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening to the voice of his word. Bless ye the Lord, all ye his hosts, ye ministers of his that do his pleasure. Bless the Lord all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the Lord, O my soul."

It is easy to see how this distinguishes the natural from the new-born soul; nay, it is easy to see how this distinguishes the man who is renewed in

the spirit of his mind from all others, however various their characters, however different or opposite their pursuits. The design of man's creation is expressed in the Assembly's Shorter Catechism, in a way that can scarce be altered for the better: it was that he might "glorify God, and enjoy him for ever." As he departed from his duty by sin, so also, at the same time, from his happiness. As he refused to do the will of God, so he no more sought his favour, but placed his happiness and comfort in the creature "more than the Creator, who is God blessed for ever." All unrenewed persons, in one shape or another, place their supreme happiness in something that is not God. In this one circumstance they all agree, though the different forms which the world puts on to solicit their affection, the different degrees in which they prosecute it, and the different ways in which they apply or abuse it, are so very many, that it is impossible to enumerate or describe them. Though there is but one God, the idols of the nations are innumerable. There is but one way to peace, and if that is neglected, the unsatisfactory nature of all created enjoyments makes men fly from one earthly comfort to another, till they feel, by late experience, the vanity of them all. Their state is justly described by the wise man, when he says, "Lo this only have I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions."

It may not be improper here just to hint at a few of the principal pursuits by which the characters of men are diversified, their hearts and cares divided, and the one thing needful forgotten and disregarded. Some there are who yield themselves up to the un-

restrained indulgence of pleasure. Sensual appetite and passion carry them on with unbridled fury. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, possess their affections, and their prevailing desire is to gratify these appetites, as far as their situation and circumstances enable them, or the rival pursuits of others will permit them. This, which is usually the first attempt of unsanctified and ungoverned youth, is well described by the wise man, in the following strong caution against it: "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thine heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment." This is the path of the abandoned and heaven-daring profligate, who casts off all fear of God, who bursts asunder every bond, "who draws iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope."

Again, There are some whose hearts are set upon present gain. Instead of making that sober and moderate use of this world and its enjoyments which becometh mortal creatures, they look upon it as their home. Instead of considering it only as a mean to a higher end, they have it as their chief or principal view, to secure or enlarge their possession of it. These "say to the gold, Thou art my refuge, and to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence." They think their "houses will endure for ever, and their dwelling-places to all generations." This is often the sin of riper years; and, that the brutish folly of sinners may more eminently show itself, it is often the reproach and scandal of old age, when

its absurdity is most sensible and apparent. What doth it signify how much men of this character despise the levity of youth, or hate the filthy receptacles of sensuality and lust, while their affections are supremely set upon the present world, while "they bless the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth?"

It is often sufficient to raise, in every serious person, a mixture of compassion and indignation, to hear those with whom poverty is the only crime, openly pleading for, and boasting of their attachment to the world, or treating with a smile of contempt those who tell them, from the word of God, that it is vain. Though nothing is more frequently confirmed by experience, it is usual to consider this as only pulpit declamation, a part of our business and profession, but containing a maxim that cannot be applied to common life. Let all such be informed, whether they will hear it or not, that however regular and abstemious they may be as to all sensual indulgence, however diligent, eager, and successful in trade, "except they be born again, they cannot see the kingdom of God." And, that they may not deceive themselves, but know in part at least, wherein this change consisteth, let them peruse and ponder the following passage of the apostle John: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world: if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

Once more. There are some who walk in the path of ambition. Pride and vain-glory is the idol at whose shrine they bow. These indeed may be divided into very different classes. Pride, which may be called the master-passion of the human

frame, takes in the most extensive and universal range. There is scarce any state in which it is not able to exert itself; scarce any circumstance which it is not able to convert into the means of its own gratification. All natural advantages which men enjoy over others, whether in respect of body or mind; all the additional trappings of society, namely, wealth, station, and office; all acquired advantages, intellectual or even moral, become the fuel of pride. As some endeavour by extraordinary actions to spread their fame in public life, others, though in a narrower sphere, are under the habitual government of the same desire. While great men are taking cities and destroying kingdoms to get themselves a name, others of meaner rank are vying with one another in dress, furniture, and equipage, or such inferior arts as they have been able to attain. Nay, those who never did any thing that could merit praise, too often show themselves under the government of the most hateful and detested kind of ambition, by a rancorous malice and envy against such as excel or outshine them. We may go a step farther, and say, there is great reason to believe that in some, the cultivation of their minds, long and assiduous application to study, zealous and successful endeavours to promote the public good, ought to be ascribed to no other source, to no higher motive.

I thought I could not fall upon any way to illustrate this part of my subject, which would make it more intelligible, than to give this short view of the characters and pursuits of the men of the world: and then to observe, That the change in regeneration doth properly consist in a strong inward conviction of

the vanity of worldly enjoyments of every kind; and a persuasion that the favour and enjoyment of God is infinitely superior to them all. Whatever other differences there may be, this will be found in every child of God, from the highest to the lowest, from the richest to the poorest, from the wisest to the most ignorant, and from the oldest to the youngest. Every such one will be able to say with the Psalmist, "There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased. I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep; for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety."

I shall afterwards have occasion more fully to explain the comparative influence of this desire; but before I conclude this section, must make the two following remarks: 1. That the favour of God must appear to the believer as absolutely necessary to his comfort. 2. As full and sufficient for that purpose.

1. He that is born again considers the favour of God as absolutely necessary to his comfort. He sees the emptiness and inherent vanity of all things else. Even when the world smiles, even when things succeed with him to his wish, he will not rest satisfied with any, or all temporal mercies. He will, above all, desire an interest in that love which God beareth to his chosen people, a right by promise or covenant to the use of present comforts, and the favour and protection of his special providence. How contrary this to the temper of many, who have a name to live while they are dead! If the world

smiles, they follow it with eagerness, and embrace it with complacency, while they are cold and indifferent in their desires towards God. Perhaps when they are distressed with outward calamities, when experience constrains them to confess the vanity of the creature, they cry to God for relief. But when ease and prosperity return, they soon forget his works, are well pleased with their condition, and neither grieve for his absence, nor are afraid of his anger. This shows plainly, that whatever occasional symptoms they may discover, they are supremely and habitually possessed by a love of the world, and desire of sensual gratification. In opposition to this, every real Christian sees the favour of God to be so absolutely necessary that he cannot be without it. He sees it to be more necessary than riches, honours, or pleasures, nay, than health or even life itself; all which he values chiefly as they are the fruits of the divine bounty, as tokens of divine love, and as they afford him an opportunity of promoting the divine glory. He is ready to say with the Psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."

2. He that is born again considers the favour of God as full and sufficient for his comfort and happiness. That is to say, he is habitually satisfied with this as his portion, whether there be abundance or straitness as to outward provision. He counts the favour of God as absolutely necessary, but nothing else is considered as such. No earthly enjoyments can satisfy him without God's favour; but this will

satisfy him, be his outward condition what it will. I am far from meaning to affirm, that every good man is free from the least rising murmur, the least impatient or rebellious thought. If it were so with any man, he would be perfect in holiness: but I mean to signify that this is his habitual and prevailing temper. He is inwardly convinced that those alone are happy, and that they are and shall be completely happy, who are reconciled to God, and the objects of his special love. His own remaining attachment to present things, and immoderate sorrow under outward calamity, he sincerely laments as his weakness, and humbly confesses as his sin. He endeavours to supply the void left by every earthly comfort, when it is withdrawn, by the fulness and all-sufficiency of God. He possesses in some measure, and breathes after more and more of the temper expressed in the two following passages of Scripture: "Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure; for this is all my salvation, and all my desire. —Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

Thus I have endeavoured to point out wherein the change in regeneration doth immediately and properly consist. It is just the recovery of the moral image of God upon the heart; that is to say, to love him supremely and serve him ultimately as our highest end; and to delight in him superlatively as our

chief good. This recovery, however, is but begun on earth; it is gradually improved in the progress of sanctification, and shall be fully completed at the resurrection of the just. The sum of the moral law is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and soul, and strength, and mind. This is the duty of every rational creature; and in order to obey it perfectly, no part of our inward affection or actual service ought to be at any time, or in the least degree, misapplied. This is the case with no mere man while he continues in the body. But regeneration consists in the principle being implanted, obtaining the ascendency, and habitually prevailing over its opposite. Even in those who are born again, there will still be many struggles between the "law of sin in their members," and the "law of God in their minds." This we find deeply lamented by the apostle Paul: "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" It ought to give unspeakable consolation to the Christian, when he reflects that the seed which is planted by divine grace shall be preserved by divine power. A gracious God will neither suffer it to be smothered by contending weeds, nor destroyed by the inclemency of this tempestuous climate, till it be transplanted into the milder regions of peace and serenity above.

SECTION III. The effects of regeneration, with some of the principal evidences of its sincerity.

In the further prosecution of this head, I proposed to mention some of the principal evidences and fruits

of a saving change. These, no doubt, it were easy, with sufficient propriety, greatly to extend and enlarge, because they include all the marks and signs of real religion, suited to every character and every situation in which a Christian can be placed. The heart being renewed, the life will of necessity be reformed; and holiness in all manner of conversation, including the duties of piety towards God, and justice and charity towards men, will be its native and genuine effect. But this would be too wide and general a field. I find most writers on this subject take particular notice of the new views and apprehensions which the regenerate person hath of himself, and every other thing or person to which he stands related. I shall therefore very shortly observe, He who is born again discovers his new nature and life by new apprehensions of God—of himself—of the world—of eternity—of Jesus Christ the Saviour of sinners—and of all the ordinances of his appointment.

The regenerate person has new views of God, both in respect of greatness and goodness. He really and inwardly believes the being, presence, power, and providence of God, which he in a great measure misbelieved before. Whereas formerly, even what he did believe of God was seldom in his thoughts; now it is almost impossible for him to look upon any thing, or person, or event, without considering its relation to God. O what terrible majesty does his sanctified understanding perceive in this Being of beings, compared to the times of his former blindness! What a lustre and glory does the opened eye see in all the divine perfections! Above all,

what a ravishing and astonishing view has he of the divine goodness and love! Wicked men, governed by self-love, are therefore insensible of obligations. Inordinate in their desires, they are never satisfied with their possessions; whereas the child of God discovers and confesses the infinite goodness of his Creator in all his mercies, of the least of which he is not worthy.

He hath quite new apprehensions of himself, his own character and state. Before, he thought himself his own master, looked upon every religious law as a hard and tyrannical restraint: but now he sees that he belongs to God; he now remembers his Creator, confesses his obligations, and mourns for his transgressions. A converted sinner often admires, and stands astonished at his own former conduct. He wonders at the boldness of a poor guilty helpless rebel, perhaps cursing and blaspheming, perhaps rioting in sensuality and lust. He wonders that the power of God did not arrest him in his course, and by some signal stroke make him a standing monument of righteous indignation. He trembles to think of his former state, and it excites in him a deep and lively acknowledgment of the riches of divine grace. How great a sense of this does the apostle Paul often express in his own case; "who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious—This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief."

The above is often connected with, and increased by, his views of the world and of worldly men. The charm is now broke, the false colours are now taken

off from the world and all its enjoyments. How ardently did he love them once! how eagerly did he prosecute them! and how rich did he esteem them! He envied every one who possessed them, and thought that none such could fail of being completely happy. But now he can never separate the idea of riches from temptation, and often considers the dreadful change of state in those who are carried about in pomp and grandeur on earth; who are clothed in purple and fine linen, and fare sumptuously every day; but are, in a little time, tormented in hell fire. Formerly, he valued persons by their station, by their wealth, by their spirit and genius, or other natural qualifications. But now, a Christian in a cottage appears more honourable and more amiable than a blasphemer in a palace. Now his heart is joined to every servant of Christ, though despised in the world, though emaciated by sickness, though deformed with old age; nay, though loathsome and sordid through penury and want. He sees the beauty of these excellent ones of the earth, under all their present disadvantages, and in them is all his delight. With regard to persons of an opposite character, the penitent often recollects, with a bleeding heart, his fondness for and attachment to sinful companions; and his kindness to them is converted into a yearning tenderness and compassion for their miserable state.

Further, The regenerate person has new apprehensions of eternity. Formerly, the shadows and vanities of time so engrossed his thoughts, so filled and occupied his sight, that eternity was seldom at all, and never fully in view; but now it is frequently and strongly upon his mind. Now, it, as it were,

joins itself with, and points out its own relation to every subject, and its concern in every pursuit. Now it is present as the object of faith, to correct the false representations of sense, and to oppose the unjust claim of earthly and momentary gratifications. Formerly, things unseen were counted in a manner precarious and fabulous, of small moment in any determination; but now there is such a discovery of the great realities of another world, as weighs down all created things, and makes them feel as a feather in the balance.

Let us here stand still and pause a little. Let me beseech every reader to ponder this reflection, which I cannot pass. O what concern have we all in an everlasting endless eternity! O subject without bounds! Who is able to do it justice in words? Who is able to reach it even in thought? Happiness that shall continue through everlasting ages; misery, anguish, torment, that shall never have an end. Are we all, without exception, to be so divided at last? Yes; the great Judge shall separate the righteous from the wicked, and shall set the one on his right hand, and the other on his left. Shall then companions on earth, shall fellow-citizens and fellow-soldiers, the dearest friends and the nearest relations, be parted asunder, and take a long, long, eternal farewell? O the strong deceit and illusion of sin, that is able to hide eternity from dying men! O the inconceivable blindness of those who are unmindful of a future state, while they inhabit these tabernacles of clay, which are so often tottering, which are daily wasting, and shall so soon fall in pieces, and crumble into dust! How is it possible

we should forget, that in a little time "we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ?"

The regenerate person has also new views of Jesus Christ, the great and only Saviour of sinners. Before, he was "without form or comeliness, or any beauty, that he should desire him." Before, (as is, alas, the case with very many,) all the truths relating to the person, character, and office of a Mediator, were hated as absurdities, or despised as enthusiasm. They were nicknamed nonsense, cant, and unintelligible stuff. Or, if decency forbade this, they were altogether cold and without relish. But now the name of a Saviour is "precious—even as ointment poured forth." The strongest language is too weak to express his gratitude, or breathe out his love. "He is white and ruddy, the chief among ten thousand;—yea, he is altogether lovely." How great is the difference between the self-righteous formalist and the humble penitent! The one trusting in himself that he is righteous, knows little of the value of a Saviour; the other, deeply penetrated with a sense of guilt, and strongly conscious of absolute weakness, "counts all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord; and desires to be found in him, not having his own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness that is of God by faith."

Again, The regenerate person has new views of the ordinances of Christ's appointment. They were formerly his burden, now they are his delight. Before, the Sabbath wore, as it were, a sable garb and an offensive gloom. It was looked upon as a piece

of confinement and restraint. He was ready to say, "What a weariness is it! when will the Sabbath be over, and the new moon, that we may set forth corn, and sell wheat?" But now he calls it a delight, the "holy of the Lord, and honourable." Now he thirsts after the water of life, esteems, loves, and desires the word of God. He now readily joins the holy Psalmist in all those fervent expressions to be found in his writings, of affection to the truths and ordinances of God. "O how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day." "The law of thy mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver." "My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen it in the sanctuary." "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem!"

Suffer me now to conclude this general account of the spirit and temper of the regenerate, with a few particular characters by which they will commonly be distinguished.

1. The new nature will discover itself by great humility. There is no disposition more the object of divine abhorrence and detestation than pride; nor, consequently, any more amiable and necessary than humility. We are told that "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." To the same purpose the prophet Isaiah, "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit,

to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." Pride was the sin by which the angels fell from their glory and happiness. It appears to have been the chief ingredient in the first sin of man; and, in general, the leading part of a sinful character. Before there can be any saving change; before there can be any esteem or relish of the gospel of the grace of God, there must be a deep humility of mind, and thorough conviction of guilt and wretchedness. This must still continue, and have a constant and visible effect upon the believer's temper and carriage. The truth is, the way in which a sinner's peace is made with God, the ground on which his hope and comfort is founded, and the means of his improvement in the spiritual life, all conspire in making him humble. "Where is boasting? It is excluded. No flesh is permitted to glory" in the divine presence. Every sincere penitent, every real believer, every profiting disciple of Christ, learns the emptiness of the creature, the fulness, sovereignty, power, wisdom, and grace of the Creator and Redeemer, from all that he hears, and from all that he feels.

In his former state, either his ignorance of God, or his wrong views of God and of himself, made him set a high value upon his own interest, and think he had a high claim to happiness and success of every kind. This made him repine at the course of Providence, and very hardly allow that justice was done him, when his attempts were defeated or his desires disappointed. What sullen impatience do many show under the hand of God! What corroding envy possesses their minds, when they take a view of

the (perhaps mistaken) happiness of others! But he that is born again is deeply sensible that he deserves nothing at the hand of God. His habitual sentiments and language are the same with what we find in Scripture so frequent with the saints: "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast showed unto thy servant" —"It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not"—"Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given." Whereas formerly, he was apt to view his own character with much complacence, and to have high thoughts of the dignity of human virtue, now he hath changed the stern pride of philosophy, for the self-denial and meekness of the gospel. He has such views of the glory and majesty of God, of the purity of his law, and of the holiness of his nature, that he sinks, as it were, into nothing in his own sight, and knows not how to throw himself into a low enough posture in the divine presence. Agreeably to this, we have a striking picture drawn by our Saviour in the parable of the Pharisee and publican, of true penitence, particularly as standing in opposition to self-sufficiency and pride: "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself: God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner."

Further, True religion makes a man humble toward his fellow-creatures, as well as toward God.

The one, indeed, is the certain and necessary effect of the other. Every thing which one man can enjoy in preference to another, and which ordinarily becomes the fuel of pride, is the gift of God, and therefore there is no room left to glory. What distinction can any man enjoy above another, but it must be of one of these two kinds—worldly advantages, or spiritual gifts? Now, worldly advantages are of no such value in the eye of a real Christian, as to be matter of boasting. All swelling on this account is effectually restrained by true religion: that which brings eternity in view, makes all temporal things of wonderfully little value to have or to lose. And even still less will a good man glory in his advantages over others of a spiritual kind. Pride can never be so greatly misplaced, as when it shows itself here. The Christian will say to himself, in the words of the apostle Paul, "For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now, if thou didst receive, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?"

I cannot help also observing here, that every true convert is naturally led to consider himself as the chief of sinners, and every real Christian to reckon that others are preferable to him in holiness and spiritual attainments. This is often taken notice of by religious writers, in a perfect consistency both with Scripture and experience. We see this was the case with the apostle Paul, that eminently holy, faithful, and active minister of Jesus Christ. He expressly styles himself the "chief of sinners;" and says, "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first," or in me as a capital and leading

instance, "Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." And elsewhere to the same purpose, with a view to his ministerial labours: "For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me, was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." This is easy to be accounted for. Every man must have a far more clear discovery and conviction of his own sins, in their heinous nature and aggravating circumstances, than of those of any other, as well as a greater insight into the remaining corruption of his own heart. Hence it is natural for him to conclude, that none have been so deeply indebted as himself to the riches of divine grace for pardon and recovery.

From every view we can take of the matter, therefore, it is plain that the regenerate person must be, according to the strong and beautiful language of the Holy Scripture, "clothed with humility." He must be very humble; he must be humble in every respect; he must be inwardly, habitually, constantly, universally humble. I know no disposition better fitted either to determine our character in general, or to decide when the Christian is discharging any duty in a proper manner. It is also a good touchstone by which to try a profession or apparent zeal for religion. I am sensible it is a duty openly to profess Christ before men, and that he has pronounced a dreadful threatening against those who shall meanly

deny him: "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, or of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels." There are many of the duties of a Christian which require a firm resolution, a boldness and fortitude of mind; yet even this should be accompanied with humility. Unnecessary ostentation is always a suspicious sign. A Christian should be constrained, in all such cases, by a sense of duty, and enter upon his work with a diffidence of himself, and reliance on divine strength.

Let not the reader think this part of the subject tedious, or extended beyond its due bounds; let him rather enter on a deep and careful search into his own heart, and see how it stands with himself in this particular. There is often a counterfeit humility. A proud and vain-glorious carriage is odious to men as well as to God. Pride in one man is always in open hostility against pride in another; nay, pride, when discovered, effectually defeats its own purpose. Not only is a man who is vain of nothing, justly and universally contemptible, but in all cases, as Solomon says, "for a man to search his own glory is not glory." Even the most eminent abilities, the most amiable qualifications, and the most laudable actions, are greatly sullied by an apparent vanity and thirst of praise. It is hardly possible to bring others to acknowledge that man's worth who asserts it with his own tongue, and absolves the world by paying tribute to himself. Hence there is a remarkable observation of a foreign writer of eminent piety and learning, to this purpose: That a worldly principle, when it is

attended with sound judgment and in its highest perfection, does homage to religion by imitating its effects. And, indeed, what is all politeness of carriage but a sort of hypocritical humility, and an empty profession of that deference to the judgment, and kindness to the persons of others, which a true Christian hath implanted in his heart?

How self-deceiving is pride? How many are there, even of those who have a form of godliness, who are wrapt up in themselves, who would have all men to esteem them, who would have their opinions to prevail, and their measures to take place, in every matter of the smallest consequence, and are never satisfied but when this is the case? Of this they are often quite insensible themselves, when every one about them perceives it without the least difficulty or uncertainty. Nay, is it not very surprising and very lamentable, that there is still so much pride to be found even in good men, which betrays itself by many evidences—impatience of contradiction in their sentiments, excessive grief, or immoderate resentment, when their characters are attacked by unjust and malicious slander? It is lawful, to be sure, in such a case, to embrace every opportunity of vindication; but as it is not wonderful that it should happen, so the real Christian should study to bear it with meekness, and to forgive it sincerely as he asks forgiveness of God.

From all this it is easy to see, that the regenerate person must be humble. Believe it, O Christian, so much as you have of humility, so much you have of true religion. So much as your sentiments are altered in this respect, so much you have ground to

think the change to be real; and so much as you take root downwards in true humility, in the same proportion you will bear fruit upwards in all the duties of a regular, exemplary, and useful conversation.

2. Another excellent and useful evidence of regeneration, is the sanctification of natural and lawful affections. There are, perhaps, few either more sure or more plain evidences of real religion than this. Regeneration does not consist in giving us new souls, new faculties, or new affections, but in giving a new tendency and effect to those we had before. There are many persons to whom we bear naturally an affection, and it is far from being the design of religion to destroy this affection, but to regulate it in its measure, to keep it in its proper channel, and direct it to its proper end. This is a part of the subject which I have always thought of great moment and importance, on more accounts than one. It hath pleased God, by joining us together in society, to constitute a great variety of relations: these ties are of God's own making, and our affections to all persons so related to us are natural, and in some of them very strong. How then do they operate? In what manner do they express themselves? Nothing will more evidently prove what is the ruling disposition of the heart. Whenever we love others sincerely, we show it by desiring and endeavouring to procure for them those blessings which we ourselves most highly esteem.

Let us take any one of these relations for an example. Does a parent sincerely love his children? Religion doth not weaken, but strengthens this af-

fection, and adds to the force of his obligation to serve them. But if the parent truly loveth God above all, how will his love to his children be expressed? Surely by desiring, above all, that they may be "born again." Their following sinful courses will give him unspeakably more grief than their poverty, sickness, or even death itself. He will be more concerned to make them, and more delighted to see them, good than great; and for this purpose every step of their education will be directed. Would not every parent shudder at the thoughts of sending a beloved child to a house infected with the plague, or any other scene where health or life would be in imminent danger? What then shall we think of those parents who, from the single prospect of gain, without scruple, place their children in houses deeply infected with the leprosy of sin, and expose them, without the least necessity, to the most dangerous temptations?

I know there are some instances in Scripture of persons who have been considered as very pious themselves, who yet were shamefully negligent in this branch of their duty. Of this Eli, mentioned in the book of Samuel, is one, whose sons, though in the most sacred office, "made themselves vile, and he restrained them not." I imagine I could easily bring in doubt, if not the reality, at least the eminence of his piety, and others of the same kind, though often taken for granted without much examination; but I shall only observe what an opposite account is given of the divine conduct toward Eli and toward Abraham, the father of the faithful. He revealed his will, and employed in his message

the child Samuel, to the neglect of Eli grown old in his courts, and denounced the most severe and terrible judgments against him and his house: "Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end. For I have told him, that I will judge his house for ever, for the iniquity which he knoweth." On the contrary, see the honourable distinction put upon Abraham: "And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him."

Nothing indeed can be more plain from reason itself, than that in proportion to the impression which parents have upon their own minds of the importance of salvation, will be their concern and care that their children also may be the heirs of everlasting life. Suffer me to ask every parent who reads this discourse, or rather to beseech all such to ask themselves seriously, what are their own strongest desires and hopes concerning their children? In those moments when your affections are fondest, and your partial, flattering expectations most distinctly formed, are you obliged to confess that your minds run much more upon the prospect of your children's living in affluence and splendour, or being promoted to places

of honour and trust, than their being brought to a saving acquaintance with Christ and him crucified, that whether they live or die they may be the Lord's? If this is the case, you have just ground to fear that you are of that unhappy number who "savour not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men."

3. Another excellent evidence of regeneration is, the moderation of our attachment to worldly enjoyments in general, and habitual submission to the will of God. So soon as this change takes place, it will immediately and certainly abate the measure of our attachment to all earthly things. Formerly, they were the all of the soul, its portion and its rest; but now, a clear discovery being made of greater and better blessings, they must fall back into the second place. There is a wonderful difference between the rate and value of present possessions of any kind, in the eye of him who lives under the impressions of eternity, and of him who believes it but uncertainly, who understands it very imperfectly, and who thinks of it as seldom as conscience will give him leave. It must be confessed we are all apt to be immoderate in our attachment to outward blessings; this is the effect and evidence of the weakness of our faith; but, so far as faith is in exercise, it must mortify carnal affection. There is no way in which an object appears so little as when it is contrasted with one infinitely greater, which is plainly the case here. The truth is, time and eternity, things temporal and things spiritual, are the opposite and rival objects of human attention and esteem. It is impossible that one of them can be exalted, or obtain influence in

any heart, without a proportional depression of the other. They are also, as they severally prevail, the marks to distinguish those who are, and those who are not, brought again from the dead. For as the apostle says, "To be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace."

Further, It is not only in abating the measure of our attachment to worldly things that religion shows itself, and the change is discovered, but in the use and application of them. The real Christian's powers and faculties, possessions and influence, are consecrated to God. His abilities are laid out for the glory of God. He no more considers them as a mean of excelling others and getting to himself a name, but of doing good. He finds it his highest pleasure to serve God with his talents: he thinks it his duty to plead for him in his conversation, to honour him with his substance, to enforce and ratify the divine laws by his authority and example.

The same thing shows plainly why a Christian must manifest his new nature by submission to the divine will. Does he receive his mercies from God? Does he love them less than God? Does he esteem it his duty to use them in his service? And can he possibly refuse to resign them to his pleasure? I am sensible that resignation to the will of God, absolute and unconditional, is a very difficult duty, but it is what every believer habitually studies to attain. He chides his remaining impatience and complaints, grieves at the continuing struggles of his imperfectly-renewed will, and is sensible that in this the superiority of his affection to God above the creature ought to appear. Unrenewed persons, when their

earthly hopes are disappointed, immediately renew the pursuit: they only change the object to one more within their reach, or they alter their measures, and endeavour to amend the scheme; but real Christians, receiving a conviction of the vanity of all created things, seek their refuge and consolation in the fulness and all-sufficiency of God.

Section IV. A more particular inquiry into what properly constitutes the sincerity of the change.

Thus I have given a succinct view of the most remarkable effects and visible evidences of regeneration. I cannot, however, satisfy myself with this, because I am persuaded the great question is, How far they ought to go, and to what measure of strength and uniformity they ought to arrive. There are not a few who may, in a certain degree, sincerely think themselves possessed of most or all the dispositions mentioned above, whose state is nevertheless very much to be suspected. On the other hand, perhaps, some of the humblest, that is to say, the very best, may be in much fear concerning themselves, because they do not perceive either that vigour or steadiness in their holy dispositions which they greatly desire, and are sensible they ought to attain. Besides, what hath been hitherto said is only general, namely, That those who are born again will have new apprehensions of things, will be humble, mortified to the world, and submissive to the will of God. In this way it will be most applicable to, or at least most sensible in, those who had once gone great lengths in profanity, and were, by the almighty

and sovereign grace of God, snatched as "brands from the burning." The opposition between their new and old characters is ordinarily so great, that it will not admit of any doubt. To some others it may be necessary to make a more strict and particular inquiry into the nature of sincerity, and what is the full and proper evidence of the reality of the change.

That the reader may form as clear and distinct conceptions on this subject as possible, he may be pleased to recollect what was observed above, That perfect holiness consists in having the heart wholly possessed by the love of God, without the mixture of any inferior or baser passion; and that regeneration consists in a supreme desire to glorify God, and a preference of his favour to every other enjoyment. Now, what chiefly occasions difficulty in discerning the reality of this change is, that there is much unsubdued sin remaining in the children of God, and that there are many counterfeit graces, or appearances of religion, in those who are, notwithstanding, in the "gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity."

That there is a great degree of unmortified corruption still remaining in the saints of God, and that not so much as one is wholly free from it, is apparent from too many melancholy proofs. It appears from the pathetic complaint of the apostle Paul, formerly referred to, of the law in his members warring against the law of God in his mind. It appears also from the gross sins into which some eminently holy persons have been suffered occasionally to fall through the strength of temptation, as David's adultery and murder, Solomon's idolatry, the apostle Peter's de-

nial of his Master, and several others recorded in Scripture.

On the other hand, there are also counterfeit graces, common or imperfect operations of the Spirit, which do not issue in a real conversion and saving change. This it will be proper to keep in mind, and perhaps, also, to attend a little to the proofs of it both from Scripture and experience. That the word of God has some effect even upon those who continue unrenewed, is plain from many examples recorded in the sacred volume. We read of a Felix trembling at the thoughts of a judgment to come: "And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." But we are not informed that he ever found that convenient season, or desired to hear any more of such words.

In the parable of the sower, we have a character described of those who not only heard the word, but received it with joy, and on whom it had an immediate and visible, though only a temporary effect: "Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth; and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: and when the sun was up, they were scorched; and, because they had no root, they withered away.—He that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it: yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended." We read also of a Herod, who not only heard the word gladly, but did

many things: "For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly." Nay, we see even Ahab, the profane prince of Israel, humbling himself, and putting on sackcloth, under the denunciation of divine wrath. Neither have we any reason, from the circumstances of the story, to believe that this was wholly hypocritical, but the contrary: "And it came to pass, when Ahab heard these words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth on his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly." These things, and all others of the same kind, even in wicked men, are represented as the effect of the operation of the Spirit, in many passages of Scripture. I shall only mention one, which is pretty remarkable, and well merits our attention: "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they should fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."

The same thing indeed appears plainly from the state of the world, and, in a particular manner, from the variety of partial characters which I have formerly described. There are many things which have a religious appearance, and are taken by the deluded possessor for religion, when at bottom there is no real religion at all; and "MENE TEKEL" shall be written upon them in the day of trial. There is a long gradation of characters between the openly pro-

fane sinner, with a hardened heart, a seared conscience, and a shameless countenance, on the one hand; and the refined, self-deceiving hypocrite, with his duties and his forms, on the other: between those who are furious, violent, and malignant enemies to religion in profession and practice, and those who answer discreetly with the young man in the gospel, and of whom it may be said, as our Saviour says of him, that they "are not far from the kingdom of God." This shows at once the importance and difficulty of pointing out the great and distinguishing characters of real religion, and showing how it essentially differs from all counterfeits.

But now, from the account given above of the nature of regeneration, and what hath been further added in illustration of it, we may see how this distinction is to be made, as far as it can be made by any, excepting the great Searcher of hearts. I apprehend that the great and distinguishing mark of the truth and sincerity of religion in general, and of every gracious disposition in particular, arises from comparing it with its opposite. It is "the prevailing interest of God and the Redeemer in the heart, above the interest of inferior good; the habitual comparative preference we give to his service and enjoyment, before every other object of desire." This must be proved by its effects daily. And agreeably to this our blessed Lord says, "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." And again, in yet stronger terms, "If any man come to

me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." Would you therefore know whether you are born again? Are you in doubt, when you find the spirit lusting against the flesh, and the flesh against the spirit? Try, by diligent and universal examination, which of them is, upon the whole, the strongest; which of them habitually yields to the other when they come in competition. Into this all other marks and signs of religion resolve themselves at last; and from the evidence they give of the prevalence of the love of God in the heart, they derive all their worth and value. Every holy disposition must be examined, not by its absolute, but its comparative strength; and the true knowledge of our state arises from the conclusion and result of the whole.

There were, in the last age, many and great debates among men of piety and learning, whether special and common grace differ essentially in their nature, or if they differ only in degree. What I have just now said, may perhaps be thought, by the intelligent reader, to imply my embracing the last of these opinions. My judgment of this question is the same I have formed of many others, that it is unnecessary, or even hurtful. It has, perhaps, if examined to the bottom, no distinct meaning at all; but if it has any meaning, I am afraid it is a question which it is impossible for us to resolve. That it may be made plain to persons of common understanding, the question is, Whether it is most proper to say, that a wicked man, or an unrenewed person, let his behaviour be ever so unexceptionable, or his experiences

ever so comfortable, can have no true love to God, no, not in the least degree: or whether we ought not rather to say, his love to God is less than his love to the creature. I confess I think it is best to say, in the words of the Holy Ghost, that "he loveth the creature more than the Creator"—that "he loveth the praise of man more than the praise of God;" and, for this reason, he hath no true love, either to God or man.

In the preceding part of this treatise I have affirmed, with sufficient clearness, that there must be an essential change in order to salvation; and that, till this be wrought, the person is in sin, and can do nothing but sin. The reason of this is very plain; that the supreme and governing motive of all his actions is wrong, and therefore every one of them must be so upon the whole. I suppose, if they were to explain themselves fully, this is chiefly meant by those who insist that there is an essential difference between special and common grace. And in this view, no doubt, it is not only certainly true, but a truth of very great importance. It appears, however, on the other hand, equally certain and undeniable, that when we observe good dispositions and good actions in one character, and see the same appearances in another, we have no way by which we can discover the difference, but by their perseverance and their comparative effects. Neither, indeed, has the person himself any other rule by which they can be judged. For which reason I would be very willing to affirm both sides of the above question, to say that an unregenerate person has no true love to God or his neighbour, and, at the same time, that this is only because no love but

but that which is supreme and prevalent is true, or will be accepted as sincere.

Unless we take up the matter in this light, we are in danger of doing great hurt on both hands. On the one hand, it is ready to alarm the pious, humble, and timorous soul, if we say that special grace differs essentially from common grace, and that there must be something quite different in its kind, as to every gracious disposition, than what ever resided in hypocrites. Alas! will the fearful person say, I have seen some who have gone great lengths, who have been well esteemed and well received among all serious people, and yet have made shipwreck of the faith, dishonoured their profession, and opened the mouths of adversaries to blaspheme. They had all the appearance of as much love to God, as much delight in his service, as much zeal for his glory, as much strictness, and as much usefulness of conversation, nay, more than I can pretend to. What then am I to think of this? Must all my gracious dispositions be essentially different from theirs? and how is this difference to be made appear? To all such I would say, Those unhappy persons by their conduct, and that alone, plainly discover that they have either been wholly impostors and deceivers of the world, or that they have loved some object of carnal affection; some lust, of one kind or another, more than they loved God. The strength of their affections in one way, has been over-balanced by the dominion of corruption in another. And that corruption which has been long disguised or restrained, at last breaks out with so much the greater violence, and the greater noise.

Again, on the other hand, by affirming that there

is a difference in kind between special and common grace, and that a hypocrite, or unrenewed person, cannot have the least measure of the same sort of love to God or man with a child of God, we are apt to make some slaves to sin, upon examining themselves, judge amiss in their own favour. They cannot help thinking that they have a real unfeigned affection for that which is good in many respects; as indeed they have, when it doth not stand in competition with their reigning or darling lust. To give an example of this: it is frequently made a mark of true religion to love the people of God; and indeed it is one of the best, and when taken in the sense I have mentioned above, as a supreme and prevalent love, it is an infallible sign. It hath no less warrant than the word of God: "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren: he that loveth not his brother abideth in death." But I dare say, there are many who live in sin, and are strangers to the power of godliness, who, upon the most impartial examination of themselves, would conclude that they did love the people of God.

Perhaps some will say, they may love good men, but they love them for other qualities, and cannot love them because of their piety. Experience tells us the contrary. They may esteem them, love them, speak well of them, and do them service because of their piety. Nay, I have known (though that is more rare) some very loose livers, who seemed to have nothing good about them but an esteem of pious persons, and a desire to espouse their cause, which they continued to do in all ordinary cases. But should these servants of God presume to reprove them

sharply, or hinder them in the enjoyment of their darling lust, their love would soon turn to hatred. Who would not have said that Herod sincerely loved John the Baptist, when the very reason assigned for his respect and attendance is, that "he was a just man and an holy." Yet the same Herod, when he was reproved by John for his scandalous adultery and incest, shut him up in prison. And afterwards so little was his constancy, that, when the daughter of Herodias had gained upon his affection by her dancing, and involved him in a rash promise, he gratified her mother's savage cruelty with the Baptist's head. The description of his situation of mind is remarkable, but far from being singular. We are told "the king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes that sat with him, he would not reject her." Here was love in one sense, or in a certain degree; but he loved the damsel and her mother, and the good opinion of his courtly companions, still more than the faithful preacher.

We have innumerable examples of the same thing every day before our eyes. Voluptuous men love the people of God, but will not obey their salutary counsel, because they love their lusts more. Covetous men will love the people of God, and praise them, and defend them, but will not open their purses to provide for them, because they love their silver and gold more. What I have said of this disposition, might be easily shown to hold with regard to every other. In short, whatever unseen or inward difference there may be; whatever diversity of operation of the holy and sovereign Spirit, the great trial to us is the same which Christ made of

Peter—" Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" It is good that we should often repeat the question as he did, and blessed is that man who is able in sincerity to say with Peter, " Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee."

I am sensible there will be many ready to challenge this, or at least to be inwardly dissatisfied with it, as too general and undetermined. They will be ready to think that this leaves the matter still at a great uncertainty; and that it must be very difficult to decide, in many cases, whether the love of God or of the world hath the greatest habitual influence in the heart. The truth is, I am far from denying or dissembling that it is a matter of great difficulty in many instances; nay, as I have hinted in some of the former pages of this discourse, there are cases in which it is altogether impossible to come to any certain determination. In some, grace and corruption are so equally matched as it were, have such violent struggles, and take their turns so often in restraining and governing one another, that it will be hard to tell, till the last day, which of them was strongest upon the whole. But this is no just objection to what I have delivered above. It was never intended that such unequal and variable Christians should enjoy much peace; and if they do, it is surely upon some idle or imaginary ground. To many it may be justly said, as Jacob said to his son Reuben, " Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel." Instead of devising ways, and making suppositions to encourage such persons to think well of their own state, it is a far safer, and much kinder office, to excite them to a

holy jealousy over themselves. This indeed seems to be the language of Scripture with regard to us all: "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." Elsewhere says the same apostle, "And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end."

The life of a Christian is constantly represented in Scripture as a life of vigilance and caution, of activity and diligence: "Be sober and vigilant, for your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour." The same apostle Paul says, "And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly-kindness, and to brotherly-kindness charity; for if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.—Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure." I beg it may be observed, that this is no way contrary to that confidence in the divine mercy, and good hope through grace, which the gospel imparts to the believer.

These are intended to animate him to diligence in duty, in dependence on divine strength, and are themselves gradually confirmed and improved, by producing their proper effects. Few seem to have enjoyed more of the consolations of the gospel than the apostle Paul; and yet he represents even the

fear of final disappointment as what daily influenced his own conduct: "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away."

I cannot help taking notice here, that there is often just cause to find fault even with persons who, to all appearance, are sincerely pious upon this subject. For all such I desire to have the highest esteem, and to treat them with the greatest tenderness and affection. In the mean time, they ought to be willing, and even desirous of having their mistakes pointed out to them. Now I am persuaded there are many who seek after assurance of their own interest in God's favour in a wrong way, and that they often expect it in a degree that is not suited to the present state.

1. They often seek it in a wrong way: they are ready to lay hold of impressions upon their minds; and, in a variety of particulars, are in danger of repeating the sin of the Pharisees, who asked a sign from heaven. When a minister is speaking or writing on this subject, they expect something particular and personal; and, if I may speak so, that he should be in God's stead, and give them assurance in place of telling them how they ought to seek it. But this eagerness, from however good a disposition it may spring, is unwarranted and preposterous. We must be satisfied to walk in the way that God hath pointed out to us; to give thanks to him for the sure foundation of a sinner's hope which is laid in Zion; and to conclude the safety of our own state from a serious and deliberate examination of ourselves by the rules

laid down in the holy Scriptures. In this way only is the most solid, settled, and lasting peace to be obtained.

Perhaps some will be ready to say, Do you then condemn in general all regard to impressions that may be sensibly felt upon the mind, or all secret and powerful suggestions of passages of Scripture? Does the Holy Ghost the Comforter never in this manner enlighten or refresh those souls in whom he dwells, according to his promise? "I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." No, far from it: I have no design of denying the real operation or gracious presence of the Spirit of God, which is certainly one of the most essential, and one of the most comfortable doctrines of the glorious gospel; but, at the same time, from the love I bear to it, I would guard it against mistakes and abuse. When any truth, or any passages of Scripture is suggested to the mind, which particularly and strongly points out the duty proper to our present state and circumstances; when this is backed with a powerful sense of its obligation, and by that means a deceitful or slothful heart is revived and quickened, this is thankfully to be acknowledged, and readily complied with. When a doubtful, dejected, or desponding mind is relieved by a strong and affecting view of some encouraging promise or gracious invitation to the weary sinner or the contrite spirit; when, in such a case, the mind is led to a discovery of the rich mercy and free grace of God to the guilty and miserable, it ought to be embraced and improved; and, in many such instances, serious persons, harassed by temptation, have had

cause to say with David, "I will bless the Lord who hath given me counsel; my reins also instruct me in the night season."

This is no more than the necessary consequence of the constant over-ruling providence of God, which, as it extends to the disposal and direction of the most minute circumstances in the course of nature, cannot fail to be particularly exercised about the holiness and peace of his own children. They obey what appears to be their duty, or an argument against sin; they trust the divine faithfulness in what concerns their comfort; and adore the divine wisdom and goodness in the propriety and seasonableness of either or both. But for any person, from the sudden suggestion of a passage of Scripture, ("I am thy God," for example; or, "I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine,") without any examination of his temper and disposition, to conclude the safety of his state, is surely a piece of presumption without ground.

Neither is it less foolish than presumptuous, for all such must be liable to be cast down by other and contrary suggestions. We know very well, and have an instance of it in our Saviour's temptation, that Satan can suggest passages of Scripture, nay, and speak piously and plausibly upon them; but their conclusions must be tried by other Scriptures. To all who are inclined to the above deluding practice, I would say with the apostle John, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God." Or, with the prophet Isaiah, "To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no

light in them." There is also a very proper advice, mixed with caution, given by the same prophet in the following words: "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God. Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks; walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow."

2. I must also observe, that many serious persons seem to desire, and even to expect assurance in such a measure and degree as is not suited to our present state. They would have faith and hope to be the same with sense. They would have heaven and earth to be the same, and would put on their crown before they have finished their course. I am persuaded, many deprive themselves of that comfort to which they have an undoubted title, and which they might easily possess, by aiming at that which is beyond their reach. They do not remember that it is true in this respect, as well as in many others, what the apostle says, "Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known." Would you but reflect upon yourselves, Christians, you would be ashamed of your complaints. You would be ashamed that you should so much as lay claim to so high a degree of comfort, when you are so careless in your duty. Your improvement in the spiritual life is but very gradual, and therefore it is

no wonder your hope should be but in proportion to it.

It is of the greatest consequence in religion, to distinguish carefully between that hope and comfort which arises directly from the promises of God in Scripture, and that which arises from a reflex observation of the change that has taken place in our own temper and practice. To entertain and encourage doubts in the former case, is directly contrary both to our duty and interest; but, in the other, perhaps suspicion and diffidence is most becoming the Christian temper, and most conducive to the advancement of the Christian life. Is there any person perusing this treatise, who is incommoded and distressed with anxiety and fear? Take heed that you be not doubting as much of the certainty of God's word, as you are jealous of your own state. Is it not more than sufficient that you have so many gracious invitations, so many full, free, and unlimited offers of mercy, through a Redeemer, to the chief of sinners? Does it not give repose to the mind, and rest to the conscience, when, by direct acts of faith, you receive and rely on Christ alone for salvation; seeing him to be single in this undertaking, and all-sufficient for its accomplishment, and therefore cleaving to him as your Lord and your God, and your all. I would not choose to affirm that assurance, in the ordinary sense of that word, is essential to faith, or that its proper description is, to believe that my sins are forgiven me; yet surely some measure of hope is inseparable from it. Faith and despair are opposite and inconsistent. If you do really believe the sincerity of the offer; if you do really believe the

fulness and ability of the Saviour, "the God of hope will fill you with all joy and peace in believing, through the power of the Holy Ghost."

To this let me add, that considering the matter even with regard to a renewing and sanctifying work of the Spirit upon your hearts, your complaints are often excessive and unreasonable. You would have evidence, not that the work is begun, but that it is finished. You desire comfort, not such as is sufficient to strengthen you against temptation, and bear you up under suffering, but such as would make temptation to be no temptation, and suffering to be no suffering. But if you are sensible that you still adhere to God as your portion, that you cannot find peace or rest in any thing else, and that a whole world would not induce you to give up even your doubtful title to his favour and love, surely you ought to endeavour after composure of mind. You may be frequently in the state of the apostle Paul, who says of himself, "Our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears," and yet say with the same apostle, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed." It is not meant by this to condemn an earnest desire to abound in hope, or a frequent and strict examination of our state and temper, but to warn Christians against impatience, and against an unthankful, fretful disposition, which indeed disappoints itself, and prevents the attainment of that peace for the want of which it complains.

This leads naturally to the mention of another

fault incident to serious persons, which will lay a foundation for a very important lesson upon this subject. The fault here intended is, falling into a slothful, despondent neglect of duty. The devices of Satan, our great enemy, are very various, and unspeakably artful. When he cannot keep men in security, and drive them blindly along the broad path which leadeth to destruction, he endeavours to make their duty as painful and burdensome to them as possible. When some persons give themselves to serious self-examination, he embarrasses them with scruples, he involves them in doubts, he distresses them with fears. This often brings on a relaxation or suspension of their diligence in duty; they give themselves up to anxious, complaining thoughts; they stand still, and will go no farther in religion till they are satisfied whether they have as yet gone any length at all. But whatever good ground any person may have to be dissatisfied with himself, so soon as he perceives that this is its effect, he ought to resist it as a temptation. I cannot better illustrate this, than by a similitude borrowed from the Scripture language on the same subject. Whether do you think that child most dutiful, under a sense of his father's displeasure, who patiently and silently applies himself to his work, or he who saunters about in idleness, and with peevish and sullen complaints is constantly calling in question his father's love?

This lays the foundation for a very necessary and useful direction, which indeed flows naturally from all that has been said on the evidence of regeneration. Endeavour, Christians, to preserve and in-

crease your hope in God, by further degrees of sanctification, by zeal and diligence in doing his will. The more the image of God in you is perfected, it will be the more easily discerned. If you are at any time ready to doubt, whether such or such corruptions are consistent with real religion; if you find this a hard question to resolve, go another way to work, and strive by vigilance and prayer to mortify these corruptions, and then the difficulty is removed. If, in a time of affliction and distress, you find it hard to determine whether it ought to be considered as the correction of a father, or the severity of a judge, endeavour through divine grace to bear it with the patience of a child, and you will soon see its merciful original by its salutary effect. What should be the daily study of a Christian, but to mortify sin in heart and conversation? and his comfort should arise from his apparent success in this important strife. When grain of different kinds is but springing from the ground, it is not easy to distinguish between one and another; but their growth ascertains their quality, which is still more fully discerned as they approach nearer to maturity. Imitate in this the great apostle of the Gentiles: "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus!"

Before closing this section, I must observe, that though the account I have given of the great mark of real religion may still leave some in the dark, yet surely it carries in it the clearest and plainest condemnation of many hearers of the gospel. O that it were possible to fasten a conviction of it upon their minds! Are there not many who appear from Sabbath to Sabbath in the house of God, who dare not affirm seriously to their own hearts, that God and his service has more of their habitual settled affection than the world or any of its enjoyments? I do not here understand gross sinners, whose crimes are "open, going before unto judgment;" but I mean the more sober and regular professors of religion, who may have "a form of godliness, and deny the power thereof." I am persuaded this is a more proper trial of their state, than any particular rule of duty. Many such persons know so little of the extent and spirituality of the law of God, that it is not impossible they may be ready to affirm they do not allow themselves in any known sin, as the young man in the gospel seems to have answered sincerely when he said to our Saviour, "Master, all these have I observed from my youth."

But I would further ask them, Whether hath God or the world most of your love, most of your thoughts, and most of your care? Can such of you pretend this, whose eager, ardent, nightly thought and daily pleasure, is only to increase your substance? who would not go to market without re-examining your transactions and computing your gain, but can daily go to the house of God without observing, inquiring after, or desiring to see its pro-

per fruits? Can such of you pretend this, to whom all serious conversation is tedious and disgustful, and the society of good men a painful restraint? to whom the Sabbath is a dull, melancholy, and burdensome season? Oh, my brethren, let me beseech you to be faithful to your own souls. Your precious time is daily hastening on; the day of your merciful visitation is wearing fast away. Hear while there is yet peace, and entreat, that God, for Christ's sake, would freely pardon all your sins; would renew you in the spirit of your minds; would fit you for his service on earth, and for his presence and enjoyment in heaven.

Thus I have explained at considerable length, and with all the care and accuracy in my power, the great and general evidence of regeneration, namely, the superiority of the interest of God and the Redeemer in the heart, above the interest of inferior good. This, I hope, will be of use in itself, to distinguish the precious from the vile, to preserve you from sin, and excite you to diligence in every part of your duty, that it may be more and more manifest. At the same time it will be of the greatest service, in the use and application of other signs of real religion, by showing when they are conclusive, and when they are not.

CHAPTER III.

Of the steps by which this change is accomplished.

We proceed now to consider by what steps, and by what means this change is brought about. I am deeply sensible how difficult a part of the subject this is, and how hard it will be to treat of it in a distinct and precise, and, at the same time, in a cautious and guarded manner. It is often complained of in those who write on this subject, that they confine and limit the Holy One, and that they give unnecessary alarms to those who have not had experience of every particular which they think proper to mention. There is no doubt but God acts in an absolute* and sovereign manner in the dispensation of his grace, as in every other part of his will. As he cannot be limited as to persons, so neither as to the time and manner of their reformation. To this purpose, and in this precise meaning, our Saviour says, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh,

* It will be proper to inform the reader, that the word *absolute* used here, and in some other places of this Discourse, is by no means to be understood as signifying the same thing with *arbitrary*. He who acts arbitrarily, acts without any reason at all. To say this of the divine procedure, would be little less than blasphemy. When we say that God acts "in an absolute and sovereign manner," the meaning is, that he acts upon the best and strongest reasons, and for the noblest and most excellent ends; but which are, many or most of them, beyond our reach and comprehension; and, particularly, that there is not the least foundation for supposing that the reasons of preference are taken from comparative human merit.

and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

Sometimes it pleaseth God to snatch sinners from the very brink of the pit, to raise up some of the most abandoned profligates as trophies of his victorious grace and mercy; while he suffers others, far more moderate and decent, who are "not far from the kingdom of God," finally to fall short of it. He sometimes glorifies his power and mercy at once, by converting his most inveterate enemies, and making them the most zealous, active, and successful advocates for his cause. Such an instance was the apostle Paul, who from a persecutor became a preacher. Sometimes conversion is speedily and suddenly brought about, and the times and circumstances of the change may be easily ascertained. This was the case with the jailer, recorded in the history of the Acts of the Apostles. The same may be said of the apostle Paul; and there have been particular examples of it in every age. Sometimes, on the other hand, the reception of the truth, and renovation of the heart, goes on by slow and insensible degrees; nor is it easy to say by what means the change was begun, or at what time it was completed. This was perhaps the case with most, if not all the disciples of our Lord, during his personal ministry.

Sometimes the change is very signal and sensible, the growth and improvement of the spiritual life speedy and remarkable, the greatest sinners becoming the most eminent saints; like the woman mentioned in the gospel, to whom many sins were forgiven, and who loved her Redeemer much. Sometimes, on the other hand, the change is very doubtful, and the

progress of the believer hardly discernible. Some of this sort are reproved by the apostle Paul in the following words, which are but too applicable to many professing Christians of the present age: "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat." Sometimes the convert hath much peace and sensible comfort, rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory; and sometimes, on the other hand, he is distressed with doubts and fears, and made to walk in darkness. Once more, some sinners are brought in by deep and long humiliation, and are almost distracted with legal terrors, while others are powerfully, though sweetly, constrained by the cords of divine love. All these "worketh the self-same Spirit, who divideth to every man severally as he will." I desire that what has now been said may be still kept in mind; so that if the evidences of a saving change can be produced, there need be little solicitude about the time or manner of its being wrought.

What I propose to offer on this part of the subject, is not to be considered as in the least degree contrary to, or inconsistent with these truths. Nay, I am not to lay down a plan and say, This is the ordinary way in which sinners are brought to the saving knowledge of God, leaving it to him, in some few, uncommon, and extraordinary cases, to take sovereign steps, and admit exceptions from the ordinary rules. This is a way of speaking common enough; but though it may be very well meant, I

apprehend it hath not in it much either of truth or utility. The salvation of every child of Adam is of free, absolute, sovereign grace; and the actual change may be wrought at any time, in any manner, by any means, and will produce its effects in any measure, that to infinite wisdom shall seem proper. Neither ought we to pretend to account for the diversity in any other manner than our Saviour does: "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." Therefore, what I have in view is, to speak of such steps in the changes as are, in substance at least, common to all true converts. It will be a sort of analysis, or more full explication of the change itself, and serve, among other uses, further to distinguish the real from the counterfeit. Too much can hardly be said on this subject: "For what is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord." It will also illustrate the divine wisdom, as well as sovereignty, by showing how that diversity of operation, so remarkable in different subjects, produces in all at last the same blessed effects.

Section I. There must be a discovery of the real nature of God.

In the first place, one important and necessary step in bringing about a saving change, is, that the sinner get a discovery of the real nature, the infinite majesty, and transcendent glory of the living God! Perhaps some will be surprised, that, as usual, a conviction of sin is not mentioned first as the preliminary step. I enter into no quarrel or debate with those who do so; but I have first mentioned the

other, which is but seldom taken notice of, from a firm persuasion, that a discovery of the nature and glory of the true God lies at the foundation of all. This alone can produce salutary convictions of sin; for how can we know what sin is, till we know him against whom we have sinned. The same thing only will point out the difference between real conviction, and such occasional fears as never go farther than a spirit of bondage.

In support of this you may observe, that in Scripture those who are in a natural or unconverted state, are often described as lying in a state of ignorance or darkness. They are said to be such as know not God: "Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods." See also the following description: "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their hearts." Agreeably to this, the change produced in them is represented as giving them light or understanding, in opposition to their former ignorance: "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.—For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." In this way is the matter represented in Scripture, much

more frequently than is commonly observed; and, as the understanding is the leading faculty in our nature, it is but reasonable to suppose that the change should begin there, by a discovery of the nature and glory of God, as the foundation of all that is afterwards to follow.

This will be further evident, if we reflect upon the account formerly given, and sufficiently supported from the holy Scriptures, of the nature of this change, That it consists in a supreme regard to the glory of God, and a habitual prevailing desire of his favour. To this it is absolutely necessary, as a preliminary, that there be a discovery of the real nature and transcendent glory of God. How can any man have that as the chief and leading motive of action, which he doth not understand? How can any man have that as the supreme object of desire, which he doth not know? Neither of these is possible; there must, therefore, be some such discovery as I have mentioned above. It is true, this is but imperfect at first; there will be, in the truly regenerate, a growing discovery of the glory of God, as well as a growing delight in him as its consequence; yet there must be some view of his nature, as the beginning of the change, and the ground-work of every holy disposition.

This discovery of God implies two things, which, as they are both necessary, so they deserve our particular attention; and it is not improper to distinguish carefully the one from the other. 1. It must be a discovery of his real nature. 2. A discovery of the worth and excellence of his nature, which is, properly speaking, the glory of God.

1. It must be a discovery of the real nature of God. He must be seen to be just such a Being as he really is, and no false or adulterated image must be placed in his room, or adored in his stead. He must be seen in his spiritual nature, as almighty in his power, unsearchable in his wisdom, inviolable in his truth; but, above all, he must be seen as infinite in his holiness and hatred of sin, as impartial in his justice, and determined to punish it. Such is the Scripture representation of God, as "glorious in his holiness.—Evil cannot dwell with him, and sinners cannot stand in his presence." It is the error of the wicked to suppose the contrary; and indeed it is the very source of wickedness to deny the being, or to deny the holiness of God; and these amount much to the same thing. "Wherefore doth the wicked contemn God? he hath said in his heart, Thou wilt not require it." "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." "These things thou hast done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes."

2. God must be seen as he is represented in his own word, which is the only rule of faith, "the pillar and ground of truth." This is a matter of the greatest importance, which, I am sorry to say, is in this age very seldom attended to, but which is most manifestly and undeniably just. If God is not seen in his real nature, as he is in truth, he can never be acceptably served. If a wrong or false character of God is formed, no worship we can offer to him, no love or respect we can bear to him, is genuine; or

rather, to speak more properly, our service and attachment is, in that case, wholly misplaced, and not directed to him at all, but something else is loved, honoured, and served in his room. I beseech the serious reader to observe, what an unspeakable jealousy God discovered under the Old Testament dispensation, as to the purity of his worship, and what a heinous crime all idolatry was esteemed. How great was the divine displeasure at the making and worshipping of the golden calf, although it is very probable Aaron only intended to represent the true God, by the same symbol they had seen in Egypt! Did not this belong to the substance, and not only to the circumstances of religion? Is it not then equally interesting under the New Testament as under the Old? Was the unchangeable God so much displeased at giving him a false name, and will he not be equally displeased with those who attribute to him a false nature?

As this truth serves to explain the nature and rise of regeneration, so it also receives particular light and evidence itself, from what has been said in the preceding parts of this subject. Regeneration consists in having the image of God again drawn upon the heart; that is, its being carried out to the supreme love of God, and delight in him, or, in other words, brought to the supreme love of, and delight in perfect goodness and immaculate holiness. When this is the case, the sinner is renewed, he again bears the image of God which he had lost, he is again fitted for the presence of God, from which he had been expelled. But if he has wrong notions of God, if he takes him to be essentially different from what

he really is, he serves not the true God at all, he bears not his image, he delights not in his fellowship, he is unfit for his presence. If religion consists in a divine nature, such a person does not possess it unless there are more gods than one. There may, indeed, be an alteration in him; he may have transferred his allegiance and changed his master, for idols are many, but he is not brought unto God; and, so long as God is immutable, his happiness is impossible.

I can recollect nothing that is worth notice as an objection against this, but that our knowledge of God, at any rate, is extremely imperfect and defective. It is so, to be sure, while we are in this world; nay, probably, it will be so to all eternity: for "Who can by searching find out God? who can find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as heaven, what can we do? deeper than hell, what can we know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea." But there is a great difference between the imperfection of our knowledge of God, and forming conceptions of him that are fundamentally wrong. There is a great difference between having weak and inadequate ideas of the truth, and believing or acting upon the opposite falsehood. Unless this is admitted, we shall never see the unspeakable advantage which the Jews enjoyed over the Gentiles, "because to them were committed the oracles of God;" nor indeed shall we see the worth and beauty of the ancient dispensation in general. It was one uniform display of this great and important truth, which is delivered with so much majesty by God himself: "I am the Lord, that is

my name, and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images." Neither is this at all relaxed under the New Testament. The importance of "holding the truth as it is in Jesus," of "holding fast the form of sound words," and "keeping the truth," is often declared, as well as that "no lie is of the truth." And no wonder that, in this pure and spiritual constitution, it should be necessary to have clear and distinct views of him who is "the Father of spirits."

Thus I hope it appears, that in order to a saving change there must be a discovery of the real nature of the one only, the living and true God. Before we proceed further, let me observe, that hence may be seen, in the clearest light, the danger both of ignorance and error.

1. Of ignorance. It is plain that those who are grossly ignorant must be unrenewed. Those who do not know God, cannot possibly love him. Do you not now see the meaning and weight of the strong language of Scripture, where we are told the heathen nations were "sitting in darkness, and in the region and shadow of death?" What force should this give to the prayers so often offered up, both in public and in private, that the name of God may be hallowed, and his kingdom come? How much should it add to the zeal and diligence, especially of those who are appointed to watch for the souls of others? What concern should it give them, lest any under their immediate inspection "should perish for lack of knowledge?" It is indeed surprising to think what gross ignorance prevails at present among many, notwithstanding the excellent

opportunities of instruction which they have in their offer. Nay, even amongst those who are instructed in several branches of human science, it is astonishing to think what ignorance there is of every thing that relates to religion.

If accident or curiosity has brought this discourse into the hands of any such, let me entreat their attention for a little. I beseech you to think upon and tremble at your state. You may have some sort of a nominal belief of an unseen, unintelligible being called God, while you know neither "what you speak, nor whereof you affirm." You may perhaps have heard, or rather, in our happy native country, you cannot but have heard of Christ Jesus, the Son of God, styled often the Saviour of sinners; but you "know neither the Father nor the Son." You know not God as Creator, nor, by consequence, your obligations and duty to him, or your apostacy and departure from both. You know not what sin is, and therefore you cannot know a Saviour. If ever you come to true religion at all, light will break in upon you in your darkness, you will no more be able to forget God, he will follow you into your secret chambers, he will come home upon you, and assault you, as it were, with the reality of his presence, with the sanctity and purity of his nature, and the terrible majesty of his power. O how great is the effect of a real discovery of the divine glory, whether in the word or by the providence of God, to a saint or to a sinner! Hear how Job expresses himself: "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." We have the same

thing well described by the prophet Isaiah, as the effect of divine power in desolating judgments: "Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.—And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth. In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats; to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth." So soon as it pleases God to open your eyes upon himself, with whom you have to do, it will humble you in the dust, it will discover your danger, it will make redemption precious to you, and the name of a Saviour unspeakably dear.

2. The same thing shows the danger of error as well as ignorance. Among many loose and pernicious principles, which are zealously spread and blindly embraced in this age, one of the most prevailing and dangerous is the innocence of error. 'O,' say some, 'every man is to inquire freely, and each will embrace what appears to him to be the truth. It is no matter what a man believes, if his life be good. Even he who mistakes may be as acceptable to God as his opposite, if he is equally sincere.' Now, there is no doubt that liberty to inquire freely

is an inestimable blessing, and impartiality in religious inquiries an indispensable duty. But the above maxim becomes false and dangerous by being carried an excessive length; and it is carried to this excess by the favour of two suppositions which are false and groundless. The maxim is applied frequently to justify an open and virulent opposition to the most important truths of the gospel; nay, sometimes, even a denial of all religion, natural and revealed. To be able to apply it thus, it is necessary to suppose that false opinions will have as good an influence upon the heart as true. If this is the case, the boasted privilege of free inquiry is not worth having, and all the labour bestowed on the search of truth is entirely thrown away. Another supposition contained in the above maxim is, that a person may be as sincere in embracing gross falsehoods, as in adhering to the truth. If this be true, our Creator hath not given us the means to distinguish the one from the other, which is the highest impeachment both of his wisdom and goodness.

Such persons do not consider, that a corrupt inclination in the heart brings a bias on the judgment, and that when men do not "like to retain God in their knowledge," he frequently, in his righteous judgment, gives them up to a reprobate mind. Nay, when they reject his truth from an inward hatred of its purity, he is said to send them strong delusion, as in the following passage: "Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. For this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure

in unrighteousness." But the nature of regeneration will serve, in a peculiar manner, to show the danger of error. If men form wrong notions of God, if they love, and worship, and resemble a false god, they cannot be renewed, they are not like, and therefore unfit for the presence of the true. Be not deceived, he cannot deny himself, and therefore "there is no fellowship of righteousness with unrighteousness, no communion of light with darkness, no concord of Christ with Belial."

I must here, to prevent mistakes, observe, that this ought by no means to be extended to differences of smaller moment, under which I rank all those which regard only the externals of religion. I am fully convinced, that many of very different parties and denominations are building upon the one "foundation laid in Sion" for a sinner's hope, and that their distance and alienation from one another in affection is very much to be regretted. Many will not meet together on earth for the worship of God, who shall have one temple above, where all the faithful, "from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south, shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of their" eternal "Father." But, after all, I must needs also believe that it is possible to make shipwreck of the faith. This appears plainly from the following, as well as many other passages of Scripture: "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction." If

any take up false notions of God, or expect sanctification and eternal life in any other way than he hath pointed out in his word, though they may now build their hope on a fond imagination that he is such a one as themselves, they shall at last meet with a dreadful disappointment in this awful sentence, "Depart from me, I know ye not, ye workers of iniquity."

Section II. There must be a discovery of the infinite glory of God.

In the second place, As there must be a discovery of the real nature, so also of the infinite glory of God. He must not only be seen to be just such a Being as he really is, but there must be a sense of the infinite worth, beauty, and perfection of his character. These two things, though intimately connected, are yet so distinct from one another, as to deserve to be separately considered. The first is necessary, but it is not sufficient alone, or by itself. There can be no true religion, unless there be a discovery of the real nature of God. But though there be a knowledge of what God is, unless there be also a discovery of the excellence and glory of this nature, he can never be the object of esteem and love. It is one thing to know and another to approve; and whilst this last is not the case, whatever we may know or affirm, or be persuaded of with relation to the Supreme Being, we do not know him to be God, nor can possibly glorify him as God. This momentous truth we may surely comprehend, by what is analogous to it in our experience between created

natures. Speculative knowledge and love are by no means inseparable. Men may truly know many things which they sincerely hate: they may hate them even because they know them: and when this is the case, the more they know them they will hate them with the greater virulence and rancour. This not only may, but always must take place, when natures are opposite one to another: the one sinful, for example, and the other holy. The more they are known, the more is their mutual hatred stirred up, and their perfect opposition to each other becomes, if not more violent, at least more sensible.

We have little reason to doubt that the fallen angels, those apostate spirits, have a great degree of speculative knowledge. I would not indeed take upon me to affirm, that they are free from error and mistake of every kind, yet it seems highly probable that they have a clear, though, at the same time, a terrible apprehension of what God is; for they have not the same opportunities, or the same means of deceiving themselves, that we have in the present state. But do they love him, or see his excellence and glory? Very far from it. They believe and tremble; they know God and blaspheme. The more they know of him, the more they hate him; that is to say, their inward, native, habitual hatred is the more strongly excited, and the more sensibly felt.

The case is much the same with some sinners when first awakened, and it continues to be the same so long as they are kept in bondage and terror. They have an awful view of the holiness of God's nature, of the strictness of his law, and the greatness of his power. This is directly levelled against their own

corrupt inclinations, and carries nothing with it but a sentence of condemnation against them: "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." This brings forth their enmity, which before perhaps lay hid. It is remarkable, that some persons of loose and disorderly lives, will sometimes maintain, at stated seasons, a profession of piety. So long as they can keep their consciences still and quiet by general indistinct notions of God, as very easy and gentle, no way inclined to punish, they think of him without aversion, nay, will go through some outward forms with apparent satisfaction and delight. Their notion of divine mercy is not a readiness to pardon the greatest sinner on repentance, but a disposition to indulge the sinner, and wink at his continuanee in transgression. No sooner are such persons brought to a discovery of the real character of a holy God, than their thoughts of him are entirely changed. They have gloomy views of his nature, and harsh thoughts of his providence; they fret at the strictness of his law, and, as far as they dare, complain of the tyranny of his government. Their sentiments are the same with those expressed by the men of Beth-shemesh: "Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God? and to whom shall he go up from us?"

I eannot help observing, that here we are, if I may speak so, at the very fountain-head of error. What is it else that makes many frame to themselves new and flattering schemes of religion? that makes them imagine a God so extremely different from that holy Being he is represented in his own word? When men will not conform their practice to the prineiples

of pure and undefiled religion, they scarce ever fail to endeavour to accommodate religion to their own practice. Are there not many who cannot endure the representation of God as holy and jealous, which is given us in Scripture? With what violence do they oppose themselves to it by carnal reasonings, and give it the most odious and abominable names! The reason is plain. Such a view of God sets the opposition of their own hearts to him in the strongest light. Two things opposite in their nature cannot be approved at once, and therefore the consequence is, God or themselves must be held in abhorrence. But we have reason to bless God, that their resistance to the truth is only a new evidence and illustration of it, showing that "the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." And as this enmity to God discovers itself in opposition to his truth on earth, it will become much more violent when further resistance is impossible. When an unregenerate sinner enters upon a world of spirits, where he has a much clearer sight, and greater sense of what God is, his inherent enmity works to perfection, and he blasphemes like those devils with whom he must for ever dwell.

From all this it will evidently appear, that there must be a discovery of the glory and beauty of the divine nature, an entire approbation of every thing in God, as perfectly right and absolutely faultless. It is self-evident, that without this there cannot be a supreme love to God, in which true religion properly consists: no man can love that which doth not appear to be lovely. But I further add, that this is abso-

lutely necessary to the very beginning of the change, or the foundation on which it is built. It is necessary, in order to any genuine, salutary convictions of sin. What is it else but a discovery of the spotless holiness, the perfect excellence, and infinite amiableness of the divine nature, that humbles a sinner under a sense of his breaches of the divine law? Without this there may be a sense of weakness and subjection, but never a sense of duty and obligation. Without this there may be a fear of wrath, but there cannot be a hatred of sin.

This seems directly to lead to the next great step in a saving change, namely, a conviction of sin and misery. But before we proceed to point out the progress of conviction, it will not be improper to take notice of a few truths which result from what hath been already said. This is the more necessary, that erroneous or defective views of religion are commonly occasioned by some mistake in the foundation.

1. The necessity of regeneration itself appears with peculiar force, from what hath been said on this part of the subject. There must be a real inward change of heart, before there can be any true religion. If the moral excellence of the divine nature must be discovered; if God must be seen as glorious in his holiness, the heart and temper must be changed as well as the life. Nothing is more plain from the holy Scriptures, than that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God;" and it is equally plain from experience and the nature of the thing. While men continue in the love of sin, it is impossible that they should see the beauty of infinite holiness. So long as they love sin, they must hate

holiness, which is its opposite, and not less contrary to it than light is to darkness. Therefore, all restraint upon our outward conversation; all zeal and diligence in expensive rites and ceremonies; all duties, of whatever kind, that arise from fear or other external motives, are of no consequence till the temper and inclination of the heart is entirely renewed.

2. From what hath been said, we may plainly perceive, that regeneration, from first to last, must be ascribed to the agency of the Holy Ghost. It must be the effect of divine grace, and the work of sovereign power. Let not any creature be unwilling to stand indebted for his new creation to the Author of his first being: "for of him, and through him, and to him, are all things." While man is in his natural state, he is an enemy to God in his mind by wicked works. The discoveries that are made to him of the real nature of God in his works and in his word, while he continues in this disposition, are not amiable but hateful. Nay, he is so far from loving him as his father, that he fears him as his enemy. This fear will discover itself one of these two ways:—Sometimes it will make the sinner fly from God, cast instruction behind his back, and increase unto more ungodliness, till natural conscience is seared and insensible. How many there are of this kind, whom one crime only precipitates into another, experience is a melancholy proof. It is worth while, at the same time, to observe what intimations are given us in Scripture, that this is the first and natural effect of sin upon all, to drive them at a further distance from God. Two instances of this have

been given above. Our first parents no sooner sinned, than they fled and hid themselves when they heard God's voice in the garden, as impatient of his approach. A similar reflection we see in the apostle Peter, on being witness to an extraordinary effect of his Saviour's divine power: "And when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." See another instance of the same kind: "And the whole multitude of the country of the Gadarenes round about besought him to depart from them, for they were taken with great fear."

Another common effect of this natural fear, in some respects contrary to the former, is to dispose men to perform some constrained and hypocritical services, in order to avoid punishment. This is described in the temper and conduct of the children of Israel, as represented by the Psalmist: "When he slew them, then they sought him; they returned and inquired early after God. And they remembered that God was their Rock, and the high God their Redeemer. Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, they lied unto him with their tongues: for their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant." Hence it appears, that, to a discovery of the glory and excellence that is in God, it is necessary that we be in some measure changed into the same image. To say that this is the effect of our own attempts and endeavours in the way of duty, without the constraining power of divine grace, is, when thoroughly examined, a manifest contradiction. If persons endeavour to force or oblige themselves to love any one, it is a sure sign that he

is very unlovely in their eyes. Love cannot be forced, or rather, to speak more properly, forced love is not love at all. In a word, it is our indispensable duty to attend to every dictate of conscience, and to follow it so far as it goes; but I cannot help thinking, that for a sinner truly and sincerely to desire a change of nature, would be an evidence of a change begun. Therefore, till a sinner get a supernatural illumination, he can never see the glory and beauty of the divine character. Before this, he may seek to propitiate God's favour; he may wish to avoid his wrath; he may desire a change in God for his own safety, but he cannot be satisfied with him as he really is. It must be the same almighty power which brought the world out of nothing into being, that must bring back the sinner from his rebellion and apostacy, according to that promise, evidently applicable to the Saviour, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness." Neither is the same thing less clearly asserted in the New Testament: "For it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

3. Hence we may see wherein lies the fundamental essential difference between common or imperfect convictions, and the effectual sanctifying and saving influences of the Holy Ghost. The first arise from a view of the natural perfections of God, from a belief of his power and severity, without any discovery of his righteousness and glory. Therefore, however great a length they may proceed, however different or opposite their effects may be, they never produce any real change in the heart. It is of great consequence to attend to this important dis-

tinction; for though imperfect convictions sometimes are entirely effaced, and are followed by no lasting effect at all, yet it is often otherwise. They frequently produce a counterfeit religion, which not only continues for a time, but is carried down by some to the grave as a lie in their right hand. So subtle are the deceits of Satan, that there are many hollow forms of religion, not only upon a legal but an evangelical bottom. I shall give the reader a sketch of the principles and outlines of both.

There are some legal hypocrites. Awakened to a sense of their danger, merely from the irresistible power of God, they fall to the exercise of repentance, and hope, that by so doing they may live. Hence the whole system of bodily penance and mortification. Hence also so strong an attachment, in some worldly persons, to the external forms of religion, and veneration for the places of divine worship. Being now somewhat more regular and decent in their ordinary carriage than before, they entertain a fond hope that all shall be well. In the mean time, they are so far from being restored to the image of God, or being governed by his love, that all this is a burden to them; and indeed it is because it is a burden, that they are so prone to think it meritorious. Conscience checks them, and they dare not run to the same excess with others, or even repeat what they themselves did formerly; and by this comparison, cannot help thinking they are in a hopeful way. But did such persons reflect a little on the nature of God, they would see their error. They would learn, that they are so far from being renewed in the spirit of their minds, that, whatever lengths they go, they

are dragged or driven against their will; and whenever they can find a plausible excuse, they are ready to withdraw their neck from the yoke. A just view of the glory of God, and the obligation upon every rational creature to love and imitate him, would effectually cure them of all self-righteousness and self-dependence; would lead them to himself and the grace treasured up in his Son, to "work in them the whole good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power."

On the other hand, there are evangelical hypocrites. These begin upon the same principles, and their views have the same radical defect with the former. They are awakened to a sense of danger, and sometimes made to tremble through fear of divine judgments, but without any discovery of the glory and amiableness of the divine nature. If such persons happen to live in a family or congregation where they hear much of the doctrine of redemption, it may have its place in their scheme. They may be so convinced of their own manifold transgressions, as to be satisfied to throw their guilt upon the surety, and rely on the sufferings and death of Christ for deliverance from the wrath of an offended God. Nay, I have not the least doubt that some may, by a confident presumption, imitate the faith of God's elect, and believe that Christ died for themselves in particular. So long as this persuasion can maintain its ground, it may, and must give them great joy and satisfaction. Who would not find consolation in thinking themselves in safety from divine wrath? Yet all this while they never see the evil of sin in itself, as an opposition to the nature, and a

breach of the law of God. They are never brought to love an infinitely holy God in sincerity of heart. They may love him, because they suppose themselves the peculiar objects of his love, with some obscure, confused, sensual idea of the delights of heaven; but they know not, or consider not the nature of that salvation he hath provided for his chosen.

All such love, it is plain, ariseth from a false confidence in their own state, and not from a true knowledge of God. Their notions of God's love to them contain more of a partial indulgence to them as they are, than of his infinite compassion in forgiving what they have been. The effects of such religion are just what might be expected from its nature, violent and passionate for a season, and commonly ostentatious, but temporary and changeable. Self-love lies at the root, and therefore, while they are pleased and gratified, they will continue their profession of attachment; but when self-denial or bearing the cross is required, they reject the terms, they lose their transporting views, and return to their sins.

There are many examples of this, not only in Scripture, but in the history of the church in every age. Many of those disciples who seemed gladly to embrace the doctrine, and highly to honour the person of Christ, when they heard some of the most mortifying precepts, "went back and walked no more with him." The character is little different which we find described under the image of the stony-ground hearers, who, "having not root in themselves, when persecution or tribulation arose because of the word, by and by were offended." I hope this, with the explication above given of its cause, may be of

use to account for some appearances in a time of the revival of religion. Persons who seem to have the same exercises with real converts, yet afterwards fall away, and "return with the dog to his vomit again, and with the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire." This gives occasion to adversaries to speak reproachfully, and is greatly distressing to those who truly fear God. But would men carefully attend to what the holy Scriptures teach us to expect, their surprise in all such cases would cease: "For it must needs be that offences must come." And though there are many counterfeits, there will still be sufficient means to distinguish the gold from the dross.

Section III. There must be a conviction of sin and danger.

The next great step in a saving change, is a deep humiliation of mind, and conviction of sin and danger. The absolute necessity of this is very evident, and indeed generally confessed. It is equally evident, whether we consider the nature of the change itself, the means of its production, or the motives to all future duty. If an entire change is necessary, there must be an entire and thorough dissatisfaction with, and disapprobation of, our past character and state. Whoever is pleased with his present character, will neither desire, endeavour, nor even accept of a change. If we consider the means of our recovery, by Jesus Christ suffering in the room of sinners, the same thing will appear with increasing evidence. Those who are not humbled under a sense

of guilt and corruption, will treat with great contempt a purchased pardon and a crucified Saviour. This our Lord himself often tells us in the plainest terms: "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." To these indeed his invitation and call is particularly addressed: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

To the same purpose we shall find many other passages, both of the prophetic and apostolic writings. The glad tidings of salvation are always directed to the humble, miserable, broken-hearted, thirsty, perishing soul. Thus in the prophet Isaiah, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price." When Christ entered on his personal ministry, he opened his commission in the following terms: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised; to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." I shall only mention one other passage: "And I will give to him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely."

From these passages, and many others in the same strain, it is evident, beyond contradiction, that there must be a deep humiliation of mind, and sense of guilt and wretchedness, before a sinner can be brought unto God. This indeed hath ordinarily been con-

sidered as the first step towards conversion. In order to treat of it in the most clear, and, at the same time, the most useful manner, I shall divide it into two branches: and, first, consider what is the true and genuine source of conviction or sorrow for sin; and secondly, to what degree it must be in order to a saving change.

First, then, let us consider what is the true and genuine source of conviction and sorrow for sin. And here we may observe in general, that, properly speaking, there can be but two sources of sorrow or humiliation of mind at all; namely, fear of suffering, and sense of the evil and desert of sin. Both these are found in true penitents; and it is their union and mutual influence that distinguishes repentance unto life from every counterfeit. Many have trembled through fear of punishment from God, and been dismayed at the tokens of his presence, who, notwithstanding, lived and died strangers to true religion or any saving change. We see that even Judas the traitor to his Lord repented, confessed his sin, nay, did what he could to repair the wrong, throwing back the price of innocent blood; and yet hanged himself in despair. The Scripture only further says, he went into his own place; but there have been few, if any interpreters of Scripture, who entertained any doubt that it was the place of torment. We every day see that occasional danger, or the apprehension of immediate death, throws some into fits of terror, extorts from them confessions of guilt, or promises of amendment; and yet, in a little time, they return to their former practices, and sin with the same security, and perhaps with greater avidity than before.

What is the essential defect of such seeming penitents? It is that they have no just sense of the evil of sin in itself; they have no inward cordial approbation of the holiness of God's nature and law, or of the justice of that sentence of condemnation which stands written against every transgressor. Here, O Christian, is the cardinal point on which true repentance turns, and the reader may plainly perceive the reason and necessity of what was formerly observed, that there must be a discovery of the infinite glory and amiableness of the divine nature. Without this there may be a slavish terror, but no true humiliation. It is only when a sinner sees the unspeakable majesty, the transcendent glory, and infinite amiableness of the divine nature, that he is truly, effectually, and unfeignedly humbled.

O that I could deliver this with proper force! that I could write and speak under an experimental sense of its truth! The sinner then perceives how infinitely worthy his Maker is of the highest esteem, the most ardent love, and the most unremitted obedience. He then sees that every intelligent creature, from the most shining seraph in the heavenly host, to the meanest and most despised mortal worm, is under an infinite, eternal, unchangeable obligation to love God with all his heart, and strength, and mind. On this account he is convinced, that alienated affection and misplaced allegiance is infinitely sinful. He sees this obligation to be founded, not merely nor chiefly on the greatness of divine power, but on the intrinsic inherent excellence of the divine nature. Therefore he is persuaded, that there is not only danger in rebelling against or dishonouring God, but a great and

manifest wrong and injustice in refusing to honour him. This strikes him with a sense of his own guilt, and the guilt of all those who live "without God in the world."

At once to confirm and illustrate this truth, I must make two observations, which will be found universally to hold, on the character and conduct of true penitents. 1. That they obtain a new sense of the excellence and obligation of the duties of divine worship, both public and private. Before, they were apt to consider the duties of worship as little more than the means of religion; that the fear of an invisible Judge might be a bond upon the conscience, and keep men from fraud and dishonesty, or from riot and sensuality. They were cold and formal therefore in their own attendance, and never heard any speak of joy or sensible communion with God in his sanctuary, but they were ready to express their detestation of it as hypocrisy, or their contempt of it as enthusiasm and folly.

But now, the language of adoration is in some measure understood, which had been wholly insipid and without meaning before. They join with the Psalmist in saying, "Honour and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. Give unto the Lord, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, come into his courts. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness: fear before him all the earth." See also these elevated strains of praise, which, whether they are meant as the exercise of the church militant on earth, or the church triumphant

in heaven, are equally proper here: "And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him, and they were full of eyes within; and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. And when those beasts give glory, and honour, and thanks, to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, the four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." And to the same purpose: "And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and the beasts, and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever." Nay, a true penitent begins to see the beauty even of the divine sovereignty, that all things belong to God, and therefore it is most fit that all things should be subject to him, according to that strong and beautiful passage, "And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, saying, We give

thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned."

The other observation I am to make is, that a true penitent always acquires the deepest abhorrence of that atrocious, though prevailing sin, of profaning the name of God in common discourse. There are many persons, not otherwise the most abandoned, who have no just sense of the heinousness of this sin; and as it is not directly levelled against the temporal interest of our neighbours, it is far from being generally so scandalous and dishonourable as it ought to be. Such religion or virtue as is founded on worldly principles and views, may easily consist with its continuance; but he who is convinced of the evil of all sin, as rebellion against, and disobedience to God, will see the horrible guilt and impiety that attends this abominable practice. That religion which is the work of God's holy Spirit, and consists in the recovery of his lost image, will never be able to bear so direct a violation of his sacred authority, so unprovoked an insult upon his honour and glory.

A fear of punishment then, we have seen, without a sense of the evil of sin in itself, is not sufficient. Let me now add, that this discovery of the evil of sin in itself, must increase our fear of punishment by showing it to be just. A fear of punishment while alone, always tempts the sinner to search about on all hands for arguments against that suffering, the justice of which he cannot perceive. Hence infidelity of heart, and secret suggestions that surely it cannot be that God will punish as he hath said. Hence blasphemous impatience. Hence rising

thoughts and rebellion against God, even while under his rod; such as are described by the prophet Hosea: "And they have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds." Nay, hence sometimes the bitterest professed infidels among those who have been brought up in the knowledge of the truths of the gospel, while they have never seen their beauty, or felt their power.

But so soon as there is a discovery of the glory of God, and the universal and perfect obedience due from all to him, this throws a new light on the tokens of a divine displeasure against sin, in the works of creation and providence. This carries home, with irresistible force, all the threatenings of the wrath of God against sinners in his word. Their justice is then deeply and inwardly felt, and the sinner begins to wonder at the patience of a long-suffering God, that has not long ere now made him a monument of vengeance.

The same view it is that not only begins, but carries on and completes genuine convictions of sin, that silences all objections, and refutes the reasonings of the carnal mind. Every sincere convert will have, in a greater or lesser degree, the evidence in himself, that his change is of sovereign grace. He will probably be able to recollect in how many instances his mind set itself to oppose, and was at pains, as it were, to collect and muster up every objection against the obligation and sanction of the law of God. The objections are raised, first against the necessity or benefit of obedience, and then against suffering for obedience, till all are borne down by the same almighty power which spake and it was done, and which can

"lead captivity captive." I cannot propose to enumerate all the objections, or rather all the forms in which objections may arise in the sinner's mind, when struggling against conviction; but I shall mention a few of them, and show what it is that must put them to silence.

1. Perhaps the sinner will say, 'Alas why should the law be so extremely rigorous, as to insist upon absolute and sinless obedience? Hard indeed, that it will not admit of any transgression, any omission, the least slip, or failing, or frailty, but pronounceth so severe a sentence: "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."' But consider, I pray you, what is the law, and who is the author of the law. The sum of all the commandments of the law is, "To love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." Is this unreasonable? or is it too much? Is he not infinitely amiable, and absolutely perfect? Is he not the just and legitimate object of supreme love! Is not every defect of love to God essentially sinful? and can it be otherwise considered? He is a God of truth, who will not, and who cannot lie. He must therefore assert his own majesty and right, and say, as in the prophet, "Is there a God besides me? yea, there is no God; I know not any." A discovery of the glory of God at once silences this objection, and shows that he asks but his due; and as he is the unchangeable God, any abatement in the demands of the law not only would be unreasonable, but is in truth impossible.

2. Again the sinner will perhaps say, 'But why

should the sentence be so severe? The law may be right in itself, but it is hard, or even impossible for me. I have no strength: I cannot love the Lord with all my heart. I am altogether insufficient for that which is good.' O that you would but consider what sort of inability you are under to keep the commandments of God! Is it natural, or is it moral? Is it really want of ability, or is it only want of will? Is it any thing more than the depravity and corruption of your hearts, which is itself criminal, and the source of all actual transgressions? Have you not natural faculties and understanding, will and affections, a wonderful frame of body, and a variety of members? What is it that hinders them all from being consecrated to God? Are they not as proper in every respect for his service, as for any baser purpose? When you are commanded to love God with all your heart, this surely is not demanding more than you can pay; for if you give it not to him, you will give it to something else, that is far from being so deserving of it.

The law then is not impossible, in a strict and proper sense, even to you. Let me next ask you, Is it unreasonable? Does he ask any more than all your hearts? and are they not his own? Has he not made them for himself? If not, let any rival rise up and plead his title to a share. Does he ask any more than that you should love him supremely? and is he not every way worthy of your love? If he commanded you to love what was not amiable, there would be reason for complaint. By tracing the matter thus to its source, we see the righteousness and equity of the divine procedure, and that the law of God is eternal

and immutable, as his own nature. Wherefore, "let God be true, and every man a liar." All the attempts to impeach his conduct as severe, only tend to show the obliquity and perverseness of the depraved creature, and not to diminish the excellence of the all-glorious Creator.

While men continue slaves to sin, it is absurd to suppose they should acquiesce in their Maker's authority; but so soon as any person discovers the infinite amiableness of God, and his obligation to love and serve him, his mouth will be immediately stopped, himself and every other sinner brought in inexcusably guilty. He will see that there is nothing to hinder his compliance with every part of his duty, but that inward aversion to God which is the very essence of sin. It is of no consequence what your natural powers are, whether those of an angel or a man, a philosopher or a clown, if soul and body, and such powers as you have, are but wholly devoted to God. Do you say this is impossible? Where then lies the impossibility of it, but in your depraved inclinations?

But we have not yet done with the objections: the most formidable of all is behind. Perhaps the sinner will say, 'How unfortunate soever this inclination may be, I brought it into the world with me. I derived it from my parents; it is my very nature; I am not able to resist it.' This brings in view a subject far more extensive than to admit of being fully handled here. We may also easily allow, that there is something in it beyond the reach of our limited capacity; but whatever be the nature and effects, or manner of communicating original sin; whatever be the use made of it in accounting for events as a general case;

if any voluntary agent hath nothing to offer in opposition to the strongest obligation, but that he finds himself utterly unwilling to obey, it seems to be an excuse of a very extraordinary kind. We are sure that no such excuse would be accepted by an earthly lawgiver; nor have we the least reason to think any more regard will be paid to it by him "who judgeth righteously."

In this, as in most other things, there is a wide difference between the sentiments of a hardened and a convinced sinner. The first, who hath no just view of the guilt of his actual transgressions, is always prone to extenuate them, by introducing original sin as an excuse for his conduct; but a sinner, truly convinced of the evil of his felt and experienced enmity against God, makes use of his early and original depravity for his further humiliation. Thus the Psalmist David, when under the exercise of penitence for the complicated crimes of adultery and murder, expresses himself as follows: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." In whatever way it was first introduced, it is certain that all aversion and opposition to God must be evil in itself, and the source of misery to him in whom it dwells; for all that "are afar off from him" shall certainly perish, and all that continue unlike to him must depart from him. Without perplexing ourselves with debates about the propriety or meaning of the imputation of Adam's first sin, this we may be sensible of, that the guilt of all inherent corruption must be personal, because it is voluntary and consented to. Of both these things, a discovery of the glory of God will powerfully convince the sinner.

When he seeth the infinite beauty of holiness, and the amiableness of the divine nature, he cannot forbear crying out of himself, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." As the impurity of his heart, so the irregularities of his life will stare him in the face: they never appear so hateful, as when brought into comparison with the divine holiness; and, if he "essay to justify himself, his own mouth will condemn him" as guilty from choice.

Once more: The same view will effectually confute and show the vanity of those pretensions which are derived from our own imperfect and defective obedience. When conviction first lays hold of a sinner, however vain the attempt, he has still a strong inclination that righteousness "should come by the law." This is not wonderful: for in no other way can he himself have any title to glory; and a thorough renunciation of all self-interest is too great a sacrifice to be made at once. Hence he is ready to look with some measure of satisfaction on those who have been greater sinners than himself, and secretly to found his expectation of pardon for those sins he hath committed, on the superior heinousness of those from which he hath abstained. Hence also he is ready to hope he may make sufficient atonement for his past sins by future amendment; but a discovery of the holiness of God, and the obligation to love him "with all the heart, and soul, and strength, and mind," soon destroys this fond imagination. It shows him that he can at no time do more than his duty;

that he never can have any abounding or soliciting merit; nay, that a whole eternity, so to speak, of perfect obedience, would do just nothing at all towards expiating the guilt of the least sin. But, besides all this, the same thing shows him, that his best duties are stained with such sins and imperfections, that he is still but adding to the charge, instead of taking from the old score: for "we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are but as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have carried us away." Thus, one after another, he is stript of every plea, however eagerly he may cleave to them, and support or bolster up one by the addition of another. He sees not only his danger, but his guilt; not only the fearfulness of his state, but the holiness and righteousness of his Judge. He lies down prostrate at the footstool of the Almighty, and makes unmerited mercy and sovereign grace the only foundation of his hope.

Section IV. Of the degree of sorrow for sin in true penitents.

Having thus considered the proper source of genuine conviction and sorrow for sin, it was proposed next to inquire to what degree it must be in order to a saving change. The truth is, were not this a question often proposed, and the resolution of it desired by serious persons, the weakest of whom deserve all attention and regard from every minister of Christ, I should have left it altogether untouched. The reason of this observation is, that I am persuaded, and take the present opportunity of affirming it, that the chief

distinction between convictions genuine or salutary, and such as are only transitory and fruitless, does not lie in their strength or violence, so much as their principle and source, which has been formerly explained.

There is often as great, or perhaps it may be safely said, there is often a greater degree of terror, in persons brought under occasional convictions, which are afterwards fruitless, than in others in whom they are the introduction to a saving change. It is probable, that the horror of mind which possessed Cain, after his brother's murder, was of the most terrible kind. It is probable, that the humiliation of Ahab, after he had caused Naboth to be destroyed by false evidence, and was threatened with a dreadful visitation, was exceeding great. It is probable, that the mere passion of fear, in either of these criminals, was equal, if not superior, to the fear of any true penitent recorded in Scripture. It is the principle that distinguishes their nature. It is the differing principle that produces opposite effects. The one is alarmed, and trembles through fear of wrath from an irresistible and incensed God; the other is truly sensible of sin in all its malignity, and fears the sanction of a righteous but violated law. The one feels himself a miserable creature; the other confesses himself a guilty sinner. The one is terrified, and the other is humbled.

It is some doubt with me, whether in fruitless convictions there is any sense at all of sin, as such; I mean, as truly meriting punishment from a just and holy God. Such persons ordinarily are displeased at the holiness of God's nature, and murmur at the strictness of his law; and therefore, however much they may dread suffering here or hereafter, they can-

not be said to be convinced of sin. We have seen some who, when afflictions brought their sins to remembrance, were but driven on by despair to higher degrees of guilt, and the more they seemed to fear the approaching judgment of God, only increased in the impatience of blaspheming rage.

However, as there is a great measure of deceit in the human heart, some may be ready to flatter themselves, on the one hand, that they have seen the evil of sin in itself; and some, on the other, to fear that they have not seen it as they ought, because their sorrow has not risen to the requisite degree. Many have expressed uneasiness that they never mourned for sin in a manner corresponding to the strong Scripture declarations of its odious and hateful nature, or to the following description of gospel penitents: "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and supplications; and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born." For this reason I shall make an observation or two on the degree of sorrow for sin in true penitents, which may enable us to judge in every question of the same nature.

1. One thing in general must be carefully remembered, that we ought not to lay down one rule for all persons. We are not to measure the sorrow of any true penitent, and make a standard from it for the effects or expressions of sorrow in any other. The strength of all the passions, and their readiness to express themselves, is greater naturally in some

than in others. There is nothing of which men may be more sensible from daily experience. Love and hatred, joy and grief, desire and aversion, show themselves by much more violent emotions in some than in others. It would be wrong, therefore, to reduce all to one rule; and none ought to look upon it as a just cause of disquiet, that they have not had the same degree or depth of distress and anguish which others have had of whom they have read or heard. Another circumstance may also be the occasion of diversity. In some, convictions may have been more early and gradual, and therefore less violent and sensible. It is not to be supposed that Samuel, whose very conception was the answer of prayer, who was called from his mother's womb, and served in the temple from his being a child, should have experienced the same depth of humiliation with such as Manasseh, for example, who had been guilty of many atrocious crimes, and continued long in a hardened and insensible state. Therefore,

2. Suffer me to observe, that the great and principal evidence of a proper degree of conviction and sorrow for sin, is its permanency and practical influence. Genuine conviction is not a flash of fervour, however strong, but a deep, abiding, and governing principle, which will show its strength by its habitual power over its opposite. Every true penitent will join in these words of Elihu: "Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more: that which I see not, teach thou me; if I have done iniquity, I will do no more." Nothing else will be a sufficient evidence of penitence where this is wanting; and where this is the case, nothing

can be wanting that is really necessary. This may, perhaps, as I observed on another part of this discourse, be thought too general; but I am persuaded it is the only safe ground to build upon, according to the Scriptures. Every other claim of relation will be rejected at last by our Saviour and Judge, as he hath plainly told us: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

Would any know, therefore, whether their sorrow for sin hath been to the requisite degree, let me entreat them to suffer conscience to answer honestly to the following interrogatories:—Has your conviction of sin been such as to make you abhor and hate it in every form? Hath it been such as to make you resolve upon a thorough and perpetual separation from your once beloved pleasures? Does it make you ready to examine the lawfulness of every pursuit, and to abstain even from every doubtful or suspected practice? Is there no known sin that you are desirous to excuse or palliate, studious to conceal, or willing to spare? Remember this necessary caution of our Saviour: "And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut

it off, and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell." Is there no sin, however long practised, or however greatly delighted in; is there no sin, however gainful or honourable, but you desire liberty from its enslaving power, as well as deliverance from its condemning guilt? Is there no part of the law of God, of the duty and character of a Christian, however ungrateful to a covetous heart, however despised by a scorning world, but you acknowledge its obligation? Would you, indeed, rather be holy than great? Do you rather choose persecution with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season? See what terms Christ makes with his disciples: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me: for whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it." Upon the whole, instead of finding fault with the duty or lot of God's children, can you truly say, 'O that there were such a heart in me that I could keep his statutes! The law of the Lord is perfectly holy. The paths of the Lord toward me have been infinitely gracious. My heart only is exceeding sinful. O Lord, write thy law in my heart, and put it in my inward parts; give me a new heart and a new spirit, and cause me to walk in thy statutes, and keep thy judgments, and do them.'

3. It is an excellent evidence of convictions being right, both in principle and in degree, when the penitent hath a greater fear of sin than of suffering. As the great source of genuine conviction of sin is a

sense of its evil in itself, rather than an apprehension of its consequences even in the life to come, there is no way in which this will discover itself more distinctly, than in the views we have of sin and suffering in the present state. Whether do you grieve most heartily for sin or for worldly losses? Which of them do you avoid with the greatest solicitude and care? Will not this show what it is that lies nearest your hearts, and hath the dominion there? Will not this show it in a manner that must be convincing even to yourselves, and leave no room to reply? Alas! how heavy a sentence does this carry against many professing Christians! How great their anxiety about the things of time, how little about the concerns of eternity! How carefully will they observe the increase or decrease of their trade and opulence! But how little attention will they pay to the growth or decay of religion in their hearts! They will dread the arts, and fly from the society of a fraudulent dealer, but will suspect no danger while their ears are drinking in the poison of licentious or impure conversation. The loss of a child, or the loss of their substance, oppresses them with sorrow, while even the commission of gross sin, if concealed from the world, produces a reflection scarcely felt, and speedily forgotten.

I have said indeed above, that all persons are not equally susceptible of violent emotions of any kind. But what shall be said of the same persons, who have the strongest passions on every other subject, and nothing but coldness and indifference in matters of religion? What shall be said of the same persons, who are easily and deeply affected with all temporal

sufferings, and yet are but very slightly affected with a sense of the evil of sin? whose tears flow readily and copiously over a dying friend, but have no tears at all to shed over a dying Saviour? Does this at all correspond with the description given by the prophet, "of mourning as for an only son?" in which penitential sorrow is compared to the most severe and exquisite of all human calamities? I must however observe, that temporal sufferings are ordinarily attended and aggravated by sensible images, and are also sometimes sudden and unexpected, on both which accounts they may more powerfully call forth the expressions of sorrow and sympathy. But it is not difficult to judge which of them dwells most heavily upon the mind, which of them would be first avoided by the deliberate choice of the heart. Every true penitent does certainly see sin to be the greatest of all evils, and will discover this by comparison with all the other evils of which he hath at present any knowledge or experience.

4. I shall only mention one other evidence of convictions being to a proper degree, which is, when a sense of the evil of sin is still growing instead of diminishing. This will be found essentially to distinguish a sense of the evil of sin in itself, from a mere terror of God's power in taking vengeance on the sinner. Time gradually weakens the one, but knowledge, and even the mercy of God, continues to increase the other. When a sinner is brought under great convictions, it is a state so painful and distressing, that it cannot continue long. Some kind of peace must of necessity succeed. Either he stifles his convictions, hides the danger by shutting his own

eyes, and returns to his former security and licentiousness of practice; or he does some things for a time to quiet the cries of conscience, and lay a foundation for future peace; or, lastly, he returns to God through Christ by true repentance, and continues to serve him in newness of life.

The first of these cases needs no illustration; the sense of sin in all such persons being not so properly weakened as destroyed. In the second, the sinner is under great restraints for a season, but, when the terror is over, his obedience and diligence is immediately relaxed. This shows plainly, that he had no sincere or cordial affection to the law of God, but was afraid of his power. It shows that his convictions never were of a right kind, and therefore it is no wonder their strength should decay. But, in every true penitent, a sense of sin not only continues but daily increases. His growing discovery of the glory of God, points out more clearly to him his own corruption and depravity, both in its quantity and its malignity, so to speak. The very mercies of God, whatever delight or sweetness they afford, take nothing away from his sense of the evil of his doings, but rather melt him down in penitential sorrow. They serve to cover him with confusion at his own unworthiness, and to fill him with wonder at the divine patience and condescension.

The first work of a convinced sinner is, to mourn over the gross enormities of a profligate life, or a life devoted to worldly pursuits. And his continued employment after conversion, is to resist and wrestle with that inherent corruption which was hidden from his view before, but becomes daily more and more sen-

sible. So true is this, that I have known many instances in which the most genuine expressions of self-abasement, happening to fall from aged experienced Christians, have appeared to others as little better than affectation. They were not able to conceive the propriety of these sentiments, which long acquaintance with God and with ourselves doth naturally and infallibly inspire.

From these remarks, let me beg the reader to judge of the reality and progress of the spiritual life. Does your sense of the evil of sin not only continue but grow? Do you now see sin in many things which you never suspected before? Do you see more of the boldness, ingratitude, and sottish folly of sinners and despisers of God? Are you daily making new discoveries of the vanity, sensuality, and treachery of your own hearts? Be not discouraged at it, but humbled by it. Let it empty you of all self-esteem and self-dependence, and give you a higher relish of the gospel of peace. The substance of the gospel is, 'salvation to the chief of sinners by the riches of divine grace, and the sanctification of your polluted natures by the power of the Holy Ghost.'

As I would willingly give as much information and instruction as possible, I shall, before quitting this part of the subject, speak a few words of a pretty extraordinary opinion to be found in some of the practical writers of the last age. It is, that genuine conviction, and the soul's subjection to God, ought to be carried so far in every true penitent, as to make him willing, satisfied, and some say, even *pleased*, that God should glorify his justice in his everlasting perdition. This is so repugnant to na-

ture, and to that very solicitude about our eternal happiness by which the conscience is first laid hold of, that it appears to be utterly impossible. There have been many to whom this requisition has given inexpressible concern, has been a daily snare to their conscience, and an obstruction to their peace. Their is such an inseparable connection between our duty and happiness, that the question should never have been moved: but, for the satisfaction of those who may have met, or may still meet with it in authors, otherwise deservedly esteemed, I shall make some remarks which, I hope, will either explain it in a sound sense, or show it to be at bottom false.

Men do often differ more in words than in substance. Perhaps what these authors chiefly mean, is no more than what has been explained above at considerable length, namely, That the sinner finds himself without excuse, his mouth is stopped, he seeth the holiness of the law, he confesseth the justice of the sentence, he quits every claim but mercy. Thus he may be said to absolve or justify God, though he should leave him to perish for ever. So far, I apprehend, it is undeniably just; otherwise the very foundation of the gospel is overthrown, and salvation is not "of grace," but "of debt." If we impartially examine the word *mercy*, and the many strong declarations in Scripture of our obligations to God for the gift of eternal life, we shall find that they cannot consistently imply less, than that the sinner deserved, and was liable to eternal death.

But to carry the thing farther, and to say that the penitent must be pleased and satisfied with damnation itself, as he is pleased with suffering in another

view, as it is his heavenly Father's sanctified rod, appears to me to be at once unnatural, unreasonable, unlawful, and impossible. It is plainly contrary to that desire of our own happiness, which is so deeply implanted in our natures, and which seems to be inseparable from a rational creature. No such thing is, either directly or consequentially, asserted in the holy Scriptures, which so often urge us to a due care of our own best interests. "Wherefore," says the prophet, "do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." Further: the proposition seems to me necessarily to imply an impossibility in itself. For, what is damnation? It is to be for ever separated from, and deprived of, the fruition of God. Is this then a dutiful object either of desire or acquiescence? It is to hate God and blaspheme his name, as well as to be banished from his presence. Can this be tolerable to any true penitent? or is it reconcilable to, or consistent with, subjection to his righteous will? Can any creature be supposed to please God, by giving up all hope of his favour? or is it less absurd than disobeying him from a sense of duty, and hating him from a principle of love?

We must, therefore, carefully separate the acknowledgment of divine justice, and most unconditional subjection to the divine sovereignty, from an absolute despair, or giving up all hope in the divine

mercy. We have a very beautiful scripture instance of humble, yet persisting importunity, in the woman of Canaan, who met with many repulses, confessed the justice of every thing that made against her, and yet continued to urge her plea. Neither is there any difference between the way in which she supplicated of the Saviour a cure for her distressed daughter, and the way in which an awakened sinner will implore from the same Saviour more necessary relief to an afflicted conscience: "And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away, for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered, and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt." I shall conclude with mentioning an instance of a similar character in a foreigner of eminent station, who had been a great profligate, and afterwards became a great penitent.* He composed a little piece of poetry after his conversion, the leading sentiment of which was what I have recommended above, and in his own language was to the

* Des Barreaux.

following purpose: "Great God, thy judgments are full of righteousness, thou takest pleasure in the exercise of mercy; but I have sinned to such a height, that justice demands my destruction, and mercy itself seems to solicit my perdition. Disdain my tears, strike the blow and execute thy judgment. I am willing to submit, and adore, even in perishing, the equity of thy procedure. But on what place will the stroke fall, that is not covered with the blood of Christ?"

Section V. Acceptance of salvation through the cross of Christ.

The next great step in a sinner's change, is a discovery and acceptance of salvation from sin and misery through Jesus Christ. This is the last and finishing step of the glorious work. When this is attained, the change is completed, the new nature is fully formed in all its parts. The spiritual seed is implanted, and hath taken root; and it will arrive by degrees, in every vessel of mercy, to that measure of maturity and strength, that it pleaseth God each shall possess before he be carried hence.

It is easy to see that conviction of sin, which hath been before illustrated, prepares and paves the way for a discovery and acceptance of salvation by Christ. Before conviction of sin, or when conviction is but imperfect, the gospel of Christ, and particularly the doctrine of the cross, almost constantly appears to be foolishness. Or if, as sometimes happens, education and example prompt the sinner to speak with some degree of reverence of the name, character, and un-

dertaking of a Saviour, there is no distinct perception of the meaning, nor any inward relish of the sweetness of the salutary truths. But those who have been "wounded in their spirits, and grieved in their minds," begin to perceive their unspeakable importance and value. That mystery which was hid from ages and generations, begins to open upon the soul in its lustre and glory. The helpless and hopeless state of the sinner makes him earnestly and anxiously inquire, whether there is any way to escape, whether there is any door of mercy or of hope. He says, with the awakened and trembling jailer, "What must I do to be saved?" and with the Psalmist, "Innumerable evils have compassed me about; mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up: they are more than the hairs of mine head, therefore my heart faileth me." 'I have no excuse to offer, nor any shelter to fly to: the works, the word, and the providence of God, seem all to be up in arms against me, and have enclosed me as an enemy to him. O how fearful a thing is it to fall into the hands of the living God! Who shall dwell with devouring fire? Who shall dwell with everlasting burnings? Is there no prospect of relief? Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Wonderful has been my past blindness! I have awakened as out of a dream, and find myself hastening fast to the pit of destruction. What would I not do, what would I not give for good ground to believe that my guilt were taken away, and my peace made with God?"

With what eagerness and earnestness, hitherto unknown, does the sinner now inquire after the way

to life! With what solicitude does he "go forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed beside the shepherds' tents!" The Sabbaths, and ordinances, and word of God, are now quite different things from what they were before. No more waste of that sacred time in business or in play. No more serenity of heart, because he had been regularly and constantly at church, but an astonishing view of the sins of his holy things; careless, formal, heartless worship. He cries out with the Psalmist, "Lord, if thou shouldst mark iniquity, who shall stand?" No more indifferent, slothful, disdainful hearing the word. No more critical hearing the word, that he may commend the ability, or deride the weakness of the preacher. With what concern does he hang upon the sacred message, to see if there be any thing upon which he can lay hold! He then hears that "God is in Christ, reconciling the world to himself." The very news of salvation, the bare mention of pardon, is now a joyful sound. It rouses his attention, it awakens his curiosity, and he sets himself to weigh and ponder the important intimation. He hears that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved." 'Is there then,' says he, 'hope of mercy with God, whom I have so long forgotten, and so greatly offended? hath he indeed loved a guilty world? hath he loved them in so amazing a manner as to send his only-begotten Son to save them from destruction? How great is the Giver, how wonder-

ful the gift, and how undeserving the objects of his love !'

Here, perhaps, a difficulty may occur. 'It may be so,' says the soul, 'but are all the children of Adam the objects of divine love? Shall every sinner be a partaker of divine mercy? Surely not. How then are they distinguished? Perhaps he intends only to save a few of the least unworthy, and to glorify his justice and severity in the condemnation of the most eminently guilty. What then have I reason to expect? None, none, none of any rank so criminal as I. I have sinned early, and I have sinned long. I have sinned against the clearest light and knowledge. I have sinned against innumerable mercies. I have sinned against the threatenings of God's word, the rebukes of his providence, the checks of my own conscience, and the unwearied pains and diligence of ministers and parents. I have burst every bond, and torn in pieces every restraining tie.' How many gracious promises present themselves immediately to extinguish this fear! "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land." "Him that cometh to me I will in nowise cast out." "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him." "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." To these promises may be added many Scripture examples of

first-rate sinners saved by the power of God, that none may despair:—An idolatrous Manasseh, an unrighteous and oppressive publican Zaccheus, an unclean Mary Magdalene, and a persecuting Paul. Then is the soul brought to acknowledge and adore the matchless love of God; to repeat and adopt the words of the apostle Paul, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief."

The sinner in such a situation, is wholly employed in alternately viewing his own deplorable character and state on the one hand, and the sufficiency and efficacy of the remedy on the other. As these take their turns in his mind, his hope rises or falls. Perhaps when he again reflects on the infinite number and heinous nature of his offences; when he considers the holiness and purity of God's nature and law, he is ready to bring all into question, and to say, 'How can these things be? Is it possible that all this guilt can be passed by? Is it possible that it can be forgiven and forgotten by a holy God? Is he not of purer eyes than to behold iniquity? Is it not said, that evil cannot dwell with him? that sinners shall not stand in his presence? How then can I presume to approach him? I, who have been so daring and obstinate a rebel? What reception can I expect to meet with, but—"Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."'

To remove this distrust, and assure his heart before God, he is informed of the foundation of his hope, that salvation comes by a Mediator. He un-

dertook our cause, he purchased redemption by his precious blood. Hear him saying in the councils of the Most High, "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt-offering and sin-offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart." Hear also in what manner he executed this gracious purpose: "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." Let us also see how this matter is represented in the New Testament: "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

It is through this man, and through his blood, that "repentance and remission of sins is preached to all nations." Is not this a sufficient and stable ground of hope? In the substitution of our Surety, we see a way opened for the reception and restoration of sinners, in a perfect consistency with all the divine perfections. The spotless purity and holiness, the strict and impartial justice of God, seem

to raise an insuperable obstacle to our admission into his favour; but in the sufferings and atonement of our Redeemer, we see how he may testify his abhorrence of sin, and punish it, and at the same time show mercy to the sinner. There is a perfect harmony of all the divine attributes in this design, and particularly a joint illustration of mercy and justice. This is the gospel of Christ, the blessed and reviving message brought unto the world by the Prince of Peace. This is "the record which God hath given of his Son."

How welcome, how reviving this, to the discouraged convinced sinner! His very concern and fear, when proceeding upon proper grounds, arises from a view of the infinite evil of sin, so provoking to a holy God. But in this plan laid by divine wisdom, he sees the guilt of sin sufficiently expiated by a sacrifice of infinite value: "For we are not redeemed with corruptible things, such as silver and gold—but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot."

He compares and contrasts, if I may so speak, the greatness of his guilt with the price of his pardon. Then appears, with new and uncommon force, the greatness of this mystery of godliness, GOD manifested in the flesh. A victim no less considerable than the eternal and only-begotten Son of God, "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person." What is it that cannot be purchased by this marvellous exchange? The believer sees with adoring wonder the justice of God more awfully severe, in awakening his sword against the man who was "his fellow," than if the whole

race of offending men had been irrecoverably lost. At the same time he sees the unspeakable dignity and majesty of God, in his infinite and truly royal mercy, great in itself, and greater still in the way in which it is dispensed: "Herein is love indeed, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

I cannot help here observing, that this salvation is so amazing, so wonderful in its nature, and so far removed from any thing we know among men, that we are in danger of being put to a stand, and can scarcely conceive it possible. But on the other hand, when we consider that it carrieth not upon it any of the marks of human wisdom, we are naturally led to say, "Salvation belongeth unto God.—His ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts." Therefore, when conviction of sin makes us feel the necessity, and discovers the glory of our Saviour's atonement, we may both rest assured of its truth, and triumph in its power. We may say with the apostle Paul, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth: Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."

But, 'Pause a little, my soul,' saith the convinced sinner, 'what tidings are here? What saith the Scripture, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?" Unanswerable indeed! Happy, happy, thrice happy they, who are the objects of God's everlasting, distinguishing, and electing love! But how can I be sure that this includes, or rather does not exclude me? Can I ever hope

to read my name written in the Lamb's book of life? No.' But when you confess you cannot read any thing there in your favour, who hath authorized you to suppose any thing there to your prejudice? Secret things belong only to God. We are not permitted to search, and we are not able to comprehend or explain the infinite depth of the divine counsels. But do not things that are revealed belong to us? and how shall we presume to set at variance the secret and revealed will of God? Is not the commission sufficiently extensive? "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Is not the call unlimited and universal? "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." "And in the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink."

Can you then entertain any doubt of the call reaching to you, or question your title to rest upon this Rock of ages? Behold, we preach unto you Christ crucified, a despised Saviour indeed, "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness;" but the "power of God, and the wisdom of God, for salvation to every one that believeth." There is no guilt so deep, but this precious blood will wash it out. No gift so great, but infinite merit is sufficient to procure it. No nature so polluted, but infinite power is sufficient to renew it. Shall

we then any more withhold our approbation, or refuse our consent? Shall not every sinner, burdened with a sense of guilt or danger, intimate his compliance and urge his claim, and say, 'Thanks, thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift.—It is salvation by the death of Christ, and therefore becoming a holy and a jealous God, with whom evil cannot dwell. It is the same unchangeable God, who enacted the holy law, and who publishes this glorious gospel.—It is salvation by grace, otherwise no child of Adam could have had any claim; and it is meet that the lofty looks of man should be humbled, and the Lord alone exalted in that day.—It is salvation to the chief of sinners: I am the man. I hear my character clearly described in the word of God. I can read my name in the general and gracious invitation. I will accept of the offer, I will receive and embrace this blessed Saviour as my Lord and my God, as my life and my all.'

Once more: Perhaps the believer is still staggered, and his faith begins to fail. Astonished at the greatness of the mercy, "he believeth not for joy, and wondereth." He is ready to say, 'Might I but hold fast this beginning of my confidence, I would not envy the greatest monarch on earth his throne, his purple, or his sceptre, but would sing the new song put into my mouth, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests to God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever." But alas! are not all the promises of salvation only in favour of them that believe? Here then the conclusion may fail. I am sensible of a

lamentable weakness and backwardness of mind; and whilst I think I have no doubt of any of the truths of God, I greatly distrust the reality of my own consent and compliance with his will.' Do you then really give credit to all the truths of God respecting your own lost condition, and the only way of deliverance from it? May the Lord himself increase your faith; for if it be so indeed, you are happy and safe. These truths, these alone, are the sure foundation of hope. I am afraid we have all too strong a tendency to look for some encouraging qualification in ourselves, on which we might more securely rest. What is faith? Is it any more than receiving the record which God hath given of his Son, believing the testimony of the Amen, the true and faithful Witness? Is not your peace and reconciliation with God, and the sanctification of your natures, expressly provided for in the all-sufficiency of Christ, and to him you are assured that you must be indebted for both? What standeth in the way of your comfort, then, but either that you do not give credit to the promise he hath made, or that you are not willing that he should do it for you? And this I acknowledge is both unbelief and impenitence.

Complain therefore no more that you are afraid of yourselves, whilst yet you pretend to have the highest esteem of the blessings of redemption: on the contrary, say unto God, in a thankful frame of spirit, 'Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, and good-will towards men. I praise thee for this message of peace. I think I see, in some measure, its necessity, truth, and beauty. I see it, I trust, to such a degree, that it is the sole foundation of my

hope. I renounce every other claim; nay, I abhor the thoughts of any other claim: "yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." It grieves me that there is such a backwardness in me to give glory to thy name, and to be indebted to the riches of thy grace. Subdue my obstinacy, and rule by thine own power. Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.'

Section VI. How the believer recovers peace of conscience.

We have now seen in what way the believer is reconciled to God, and delivered from condemnation. It will not be improper, however, also to consider how he recovers peace of conscience, and how his heart and life are governed in his after walk. This will serve more fully to illustrate the influence and operation of the truths of the gospel. There is even a necessity for doing so on two different accounts: First, That, as has been shown above at considerable length, every true penitent is deeply and inwardly sensible of the evil of sin in itself. He is not merely afraid of wrath, but sees the impurity and pollution of his own heart. Supposing, therefore, will the intelligent reader say, this great distinction thoroughly established, his relief is but half accomplished. There

may be no more condemnation for him in the law of God, for the breach of which satisfaction has been made and accepted; but he is only so much the more liable to the condemnation of his own conscience. He must still suffer the reproaches and challenges of his own mind, which makes so great a part of the misery of a guilty state.

This receives additional strength from a second consideration, that as he is justified by faith, he hath peace only through the blood of Christ. This is not from himself, and may be thought to leave him, so to speak, in point of state and character, in point of pollution and defilement, just as before; nay, the extraordinary, unsolicited, undeserved grace of God, may be thought to increase his self-condemnation, and set the malignity of his rebellion in the strongest light. And indeed so far this is true, that the free grace of God was intended, and does serve to produce a growing humiliation of mind and self-abasement, as well as an admiration of the love of God in Christ Jesus. As the tenderness of a parent is an image which God hath very frequently made use of to shadow forth his own infinite compassion, I will borrow from it an illustration of the two remarks just now made. Suppose any child has offended a parent by a gross instance of undutiful behaviour, for which he hath been severely reproved, and for some time kept at a distance; if the parent forgives him, and receives him again into his favour, does not his being thus freed from the fear of suffering, leave full room for his concern at the offence? And does not a sense of his father's love melt his heart more for having grieved such a parent, than any terror upon

his mind for the punishment of the crime? He is immediately covered with confusion; and if there be in him any spark of ingenuity, he is no sooner forgiven of his father, than the tide of his affections returns back with full force, and he can hardly forgive himself.

But notwithstanding this, as Christ by his sufferings and death delivered us from the wrath to come, so by the shedding of his precious blood the heart is also, as the Scripture expresses it, sprinkled from an evil conscience. On this important subject, which leads us to the great principles of the spiritual life, the following particulars are recommended to the serious attention of the reader.

1. Through Jesus Christ, and the whole of his undertaking as Mediator of the new covenant, the glory and honour of God is most admirably promoted, and a perfect reparation made to his holy law which had been broken. This must needs be highly pleasing to every convinced sinner. As the justice of God is thereby satisfied, so conscience, which is God's vicegerent, and as it were pleads his cause, is satisfied by the same means. The ground of a sinner's dissatisfaction with himself, is the dishonour done to God. Must it not, therefore, please and satisfy him to see this dishonour so perfectly removed, and so much of the divine glory shining in the work of redemption? All the divine perfections appear there with distinguished lustre; and must not this be highly refreshing to the pardoned criminal? The very holiness and justice of God, which before were terrible to him, are now amiable. He also contemplates and adores the divine wisdom, as it is to be

seen in the cross of Christ. We are told that even the celestial hosts have new discoveries of the wisdom of God, in this great design of Providence: "To the intent that now, unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God." How much more must the interested believer, with peculiar complacency, approve and adore it! But, above all, if that love and mercy which reigns through the whole is glorious to God, must it not be delightful to the Christian? God is love, and his tender mercies are over all his other works; but creating and preserving goodness are shaded and eclipsed by redeeming love. It is the theme of the praises of heaven, where Christ, as the object of worship, is represented as appearing "like a lamb that had been slain."

2. Believers have peace of conscience through Christ, as their redemption through his blood serves for their own humiliation and self-abasement, for the manifestation of the evil of sin, and the vileness and unworthiness of the sinner. Nothing could be so well contrived as the doctrine of the cross, in its purity and simplicity, to stain the pride of all human glory. We are particularly called to deny ourselves, and to derive our worth and strength from our Redeemer, in whom "it hath pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell," and from whose fulness all his disciples must "receive, and grace for grace." No hope of mercy but through him: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me."—"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be

saved." No access to the throne of grace, or acceptance in worship, but through him: "In whom we have access with boldness and confidence through the faith of him." "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." No hope of stability in duty, of usefulness, or holiness of conversation, but by the continued exercise of faith in him. "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing."

Hard sayings and humbling doctrine indeed! But this is appeasing to the conscience, for as conscience condemns us as guilty and undeserving, this condemnation is ratified in every particular by the gospel. These very circumstances in this doctrine, which provoke the hatred or invite the contempt of worldly men, do but so much the more endear it to the convinced soul; and he says from the heart, 'It is highly just and reasonable that God alone should be exalted, and that he, through our Redeemer, should have the whole praise of our recovery and salvation.' Agreeably to this, it will be found that the apostles, in celebrating the grace of God, seldom omit an express condemnation of themselves, and a renunciation of all merit of their own, which indeed in every passage on this subject is manifestly implied: "For by grace ye are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast: for we are his workmanship,

created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." "Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."

3. Believers have peace from the challenges of an evil conscience through Christ, as they have an absolute assurance of being delivered from the power of sin, and effectually enabled to glorify him with their souls and with their bodies which are his. This must be the most earnest desire of every convinced sinner. He breathes after deliverance from the bondage of sin; the more he hath felt the weight of his chains, the more he longs to be free. This is inseparable from genuine convictions, on the principles above laid down. How much must it contribute to compose the conscience, to know that this desire shall certainly be accomplished! However much cause he may have to condemn himself for his past provocations, or to dread the weakness of his own resolutions of future amendment, he knows and trusts in the power of his Redeemer. He knows that henceforth he shall not serve sin, that its dominion shall be gradually broken through life, and entirely destroyed at death. As the end of Christ's coming was to glorify his heavenly Father, he knows that the glory of God cannot be promoted by leaving the sinner under the bondage of corruption, and therefore that he shall be purified, and made meet to be a "partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light."

If we look with care and attention into the New Testament, we shall perceive that there is a close and mutual connection between our justification and sanctification, and that both are represented as the fruit of our Redeemer's purchase: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit: for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death: for what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh." All the blessings of salvation are represented as following one another in a continued chain or series, not one link of which can possibly be broken: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified." There is a cleansing and purifying virtue in the blood of Christ, as well as an infinite value in the way of purchase and atonement: "For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works, to serve the living God?"

None but real Christians, exercised in the spiritual life, know the value or necessity of the promises of strength and assistance contained in the Scriptures.

The glory of their Redeemer's person, spoken of in so magnificent terms, both in the Old Testament and the New, is surveyed by them with the most exquisite delight. The power and efficacy of his administration is to them a source of unspeakable comfort. Under him, as the Captain of their salvation, they display their banners, and go forth with undaunted courage to meet every opposing enemy, believing that they shall be "more than conquerors through him that loved them." Among many others, see the two following passages: "O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength: lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! Behold, the Lord God will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." "Fear thou not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. Behold, all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish. Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, even them that contended with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought. For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not, I will help thee."

Section VII. How the Christian is governed in his daily conversation.

Before concluding this chapter, I shall speak a few words of the principles by which a believer is governed in his after obedience. On this the reader may observe, that a change in his whole character and conduct immediately and necessarily takes place. The love of God is "shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost," and is the commanding principle of all his future actions. It constantly discovers its influence, except in so far as it is resisted and counteracted by the remaining struggles of that "law in his members, which warreth against the law of God in his mind." By the discovery which he hath obtained of the real nature and infinite amiableness of God, his will is renewed; he approves the things that are excellent, and gets such an impression of the obligation of the law of God, as cannot be afterwards effaced. So long, however, as he continues under a load of unforgiven guilt, and sees every perfection of God armed with terror against himself, there can be little else than slavish fear: but when he hears a gracious promise of pardon; when, on examining the evidence, his doubt and uncertainty is removed; when he sees the righteous ground on which this forgiveness is built, he lays hold of it as his own, and is united to God by unfeigned love. This love, though weak in its measure, is, notwithstanding, perfect in its nature, and therefore powerful in its influence; being at once a love of esteem, of gratitude, and of desire.

The love of God is the first precept of the moral law, and the first duty of every intelligent creature; but it is easy to see, that unless our love is fixed upon the true God, it is spurious and unprofitable; and, unless the true God is seen in "the face of Jesus Christ," for any sinner to love him is impossible: but through the glorious gospel the new nature is effectually produced, and cannot be produced in any other way. It is Christ Jesus who reveals to us the true God, the knowledge of whom we had lost. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." It is he who makes our peace with God, whom we had offended by our transgressions; for, "being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." And it is he who reconcileth our minds to God, by discovering his mercy to us; so that he might well say of himself, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me."

I might easily show, that the love of God is the source, the sum, and the perfection of holiness. All other duties naturally flow from it; nay, all other duties are nothing else but the necessary expressions of it. But instead of entering into a particular detail, suffer me only to observe these two things:—First, That a believer is under the constant influence of gratitude to God; and, Secondly, That this includes in it, and will certainly produce, the most sincere and fervent love to all his fellow-creatures.

1. A believer is under the constant influence of

gratitude to God, and that not of a common kind. It is not merely thankfulness to a bountiful and liberal benefactor for mercies which have not been deserved, but a deep sense of obligation to a Saviour who loved him, and washed him in his own blood from the guilt he had contracted; who saved him by his own death from the dreadful penalty which he had incurred. What the influence of this must be, we may gather from the words of the apostle Paul: "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again."

I cannot immediately drop this subject, but entreat the reader to observe how deeply a sense of redeeming love must be engraven on the heart of every believer. On how many circumstances will he expatiate, which serve to magnify the grace of God, and point out the force of his own obligations! The infinite greatness and glory of God, independent and all-sufficient, that he should have compassion on the guilty sinner, and say, "Deliver him from going down into the pit; I have found a ransom!" O how piercing those rays of love which could reach from the Godhead to man! To this he will never fail to add his own unworthiness, his numerous, aggravated, repeated provocations. He never loses sight of those sins which first compelled him to fly for refuge "to the hope set before him." His own interest obliged him to remember them before, as exposing him to condemnation, and he is now willing to confess and record them, as serving to illustrate the divine mercy.

And let us never forget the unspeakable gift of God, "that he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all." How shall we sufficiently wonder at the boundless mercy of the Father, and the infinite condescension of the Son, when we reflect upon his incarnation, and on the astonishing end of his appearance in our nature, that he might "bear our sins in his own body on the tree." Did he overcome all his enemies in his last conflict, and "make a show of them openly, triumphing over them in his cross?" And shall he not also, by the same means, reign in his people's hearts, and be the sovereign Lord of all their affections?

To all this I shall only add that glorious inheritance which is provided for every vessel of mercy, after he hath passed his preparatory trials. How well may we join with the apostle Peter in this solemn form of thanksgiving, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." Now, when all these circumstances are considered by the believer, together with such as may be peculiar to himself and his own past conduct, must he not be ready to cry out, 'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? O that I knew how I might repay some small part of my infinite obligations! O that I knew by what means, or at what expense, I might magnify and do thee honour! Write thy laws in my heart, and put them in my inward parts, and enable me in every possible way to show that I love thee, because thou hast first loved me.'

2. This plainly includes in it, and will certainly produce, the most sincere and fervent love to his fellow-creatures. As love to God is the first, so love to man is the second commandment of the moral law. We have our Lord's own authority for saying it is *like* unto the first: and that love which "worketh no ill to his neighbour," is the "fulfilling of the law." Every one is ready to acknowledge, that love to man is an important branch of practical religion. But many great pleaders for this duty do not sufficiently attend to its inseparable connection with the love of God, and, in particular, with a sense of redeeming love, or the love of God in Christ; yet, is there no such principle of universal love any where to be found?

In order to take a short view of this, it will be proper to distinguish our brethren of mankind into the two general classes of bad men and good. As to bad men, the same love to God, the same concern for his glory which fills the Christian with grief and indignation at their most daring offences, inspires the most ardent desire for their recovery and salvation. This is the only love to them which is either acceptable to God or profitable to themselves. It will show itself in all the offices of kindness and humanity; in instructing them where there is ability, admonishing them where there is opportunity, and in pleading for them at the throne of grace, to which there is always undisturbed access. The believer, knowing the danger of sin, and having a prospect of approaching eternity, is moved with compassion for blind and inconsiderate sinners. Their conduct leads him to reflect upon the depravity of his own nature,

and earnestly to pray that they may be partakers of divine grace.

He that loveth God is under little temptation to hate his brother; or rather, in so far as he loveth God sincerely, he is under none at all. Hatred commonly ariseth from envy and rival pursuits. But a Christian, more than satisfied with his own portion, hath no occasion to envy others either what they possess or prosecute. In what a contemptible light does he look upon the honours, riches, and pleasures, about which there is so violent a struggle among worldly men! It is impossible, therefore, that he should hate those who do not interfere with him, though in many cases he is disposed heartily to pity their folly and delusion.

Nay, the matter does not even rest here, for the Christian is laid under the most express command to love his personal enemies, "to bless them that curse him, to pray for them who despitefully use him and persecute him." This is the glory of the gospel, which gives the doctrine of Christ a lustre far superior to the most admired systems of human virtue. And however hard a saying it may appear at first view, when we consider the character and hopes of a penitent sinner, and the example of his expiring Saviour, it hath nothing strange or incredible in it at all, that he who expects from the free grace of God pardon for his innumerable and aggravated offences, should be ready to forgive the far slighter trespasses of his brethren against himself. Or rather, that he should take the highest pleasure, and think it his honour to do so, when he remembers his Redeemer's dying words, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

As to good men there is no manner of difficulty; they are united together by the tenderest and the strongest ties, and love one another with a pure heart fervently. It was no wonder that, when Christianity was in a persecuted state, the heathens should make the remark, "Behold how these Christians love one another!" They had a common character, a common Saviour, common sufferings, and common hopes. And must it not be the same still? for "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution." If they are not persecuted with the swords, they shall be persecuted with the tongues of men. They have the strongest motives to love one another, and nothing to divide them, for there can be no rivalship or jealousy between those who possess or court the true riches. There is enough in an all-sufficient God to satisfy the desires of all his saints; and they being intimately united to the one only living and true God, must of consequence be united to one another. This is the tenor of their Saviour's intercessory prayer: "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me."

CONCLUSION.

I SHALL now close this discourse with some practical improvement of these important truths. Several reflections have indeed already been interwoven with the particular branches of this subject, and the light which they throw on other parts of religion pointed out. I shall, therefore, at this time, only make a few observations upon the whole, and proceed to a serious address to all my readers on this most interesting subject. And,

1. From the various truths above established, and the order in which they have been opened, we may see the indissoluble connection between salvation by the grace of God, and holiness in heart and conversation. We may see their equal importance and their influence upon one another. There are many who attempt to divide those things which God hath inseparably joined. Many insist only on the duties of the law of God, and our natural obligations to obedience; and are hardly brought to any mention of the righteousness of Christ, as the ground of a sinner's acceptance before God. Nay, some scruple not to affirm, that the doctrine of justification by free grace, or a sinner's being found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, weakens the obligation to holiness, and tends to introduce licentiousness of practice. But from what hath been said in the above discourse, we may learn, not only in general the absolute necessity of a change, but how this stands connected with the purchase and gift of salvation, the

character and work of a Redeemer. It will plainly appear, that a change in some respects is necessary to bring us to, and in others is the necessary effect and consequence of, the acceptance of salvation.

I have endeavoured in the preceding pages to show, that a discovery of the nature and glory of God, and of the infinite evil of sin, is absolutely necessary in order to our either understanding or relishing the doctrine of the cross. What is this then but a change begun? Must not the dominion of sin in every such person have received a mortal blow? Doth any thing more directly tend to holiness, than to see the power and glory of a holy God, and how "evil and bitter a thing" it is to depart from him? On the other hand, is it not necessary, to complete the change, that there be a sense of reconciliation and peace? "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" Can any person live in the love and service of God, while he conceives him to be his enemy, and supposes himself still the object of his wrath and displeasure? But supposing this reconciliation obtained, let me boldly ask, What motive to holiness in all manner of conversation equal to the force of redeeming love? Judge, O Christian! will any cold reasoning on the nature and beauty of virtue have such an effect in mortifying corruptions, as a believing view of a pierced Saviour? Where shall we find so faithful, so active, so cheerful, a servant of God, as one who joins with the apostle Paul in saying: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for

me." Faith in Christ Jesus never can take place in any heart, unless there has been an internal work of the Spirit of God testifying of him; and there is no effectual principle of new obedience, but faith which worketh by love.

2. What has been said above will serve to explain some controversies with which the truths of the gospel have been often darkened and perplexed; particularly those relating to the priority or right of precedency, so to speak, between faith and repentance. Some make repentance, that is, as they explain it, sorrow for sin, serious resolutions of forsaking it, and begun reformation, the joint grounds of our acceptance with the merit of a Saviour. These, with great plausibility, state the matter thus: That our sincerity is accepted through the satisfaction of Christ, instead of that perfect obedience to which we cannot now attain; and, when taken in a certain light, this assertion is undoubtedly true. Others, discerning the falsehood that may lurk under this representation, and fearing the consequences of every self-righteous plan, are tempted to go to the opposite extreme. That they might show salvation to be wholly of grace, some have even presumed to use this harsh and unscriptural expression, that it is not necessary to forsake sin in order to come to Christ. I could show a sense in which this also is true, even as it is not necessary to forsake your disease in order to apply to the physician. But if it is not necessary to forsake it, I am sure it is necessary, in both cases, to hate it, and desire deliverance from it.

This difficulty will be easily solved from what has been said in the preceding parts of this treatise, and

we may learn to preserve the truth, without exposing it to the scorn or resentment of its enemies. The reader may observe, then, that none can see the form or comeliness of a Saviour standing in the room of sinners, and purchasing forgiveness from a holy God, till the glory of this God is discovered, till the guilt of sin lays hold of the conscience, and its power is both felt and lamented. This may perhaps be called repentance, and I believe it is called so sometimes in the holy Scriptures, particularly in the following passage: "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." But the sinner does not so properly forsake sin in order to come to Christ, as he flies to him for deliverance from its condemning guilt and enslaving power. He is so far from coming to God with a gift in his hand, even of his own prayers and penitential tears, that his convictions continue to follow him, if I may speak so, through every lurking place, till he is entirely subjected, till he is stripped naked and bare, and deprived of every shadow of excuse. Then it is that salvation through a despised crucified Saviour becomes unspeakably amiable in all its parts, sin becomes more perfectly hateful, and an assured prospect is obtained of its immediate mortification; and, in due time, of its entire and complete destruction. Thus faith and repentance are involved in one another; they produce, and are produced by one another. They may be treated of distinctly, but they cannot exist separately. So that whenever any of them is found alone, or stands independent of the other, that very thing is a sufficient evidence that it is false and spurious.

3. From what has been said on this subject, we may be enabled to judge what are the fundamental and essential doctrines of the gospel, to which all others are but subordinate and subservient. Regeneration, or the new birth, we are warranted to say, after the example of our Saviour, is absolutely necessary to salvation: "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." If any man, therefore, depart from this truth, he makes shipwreck of the faith, and will at last be found to fight against God. It is also plain, that the reconciliation of a sinner to God must be through the blood of the atonement: "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Christ Jesus." If any man hold by, and build upon this great foundation, he shall be finally accepted, though many things may be found in him justly blame-worthy. Nor is it easy, indeed, to say what degree of error and misapprehension concerning these truths themselves, may be consistent with abiding by the substance. But certainly all who directly and openly oppose them, may be said "to bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and to bring upon themselves swift destruction."

This may teach us what judgment Christians ought to form of the many parties and factions which divide the visible church. There may be smaller differences which keep them asunder on earth, while in faith and in love to an unseen Saviour they are perfectly united. We are told that God shall gather his elect from the four winds, and that "many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of

heaven." I always think with much pleasure, on the perfect union of this great and general assembly of the church of the first-born. Then, all other distinctions, all other designations, shall be abolished, and those shall make one pure and unmixed society, who have received "a white stone and a new name," and "whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life." The prospect of this should keep us from immoderate resentment, at present, against any of whom we have reason to think that they hold the foundation, are acquainted with real and practical religion, or have had experience of a saving change.

No man indeed can deny it to be just, that every one should endeavour to support that plan of the discipline and government of the church of Christ, and even the minutest parts of it, which appear to him to be founded upon the word of God. But still sound doctrine is more to be esteemed than any form. Still we ought to consider the excellence of every particular form, as consisting in its fitness to promote or preserve the knowledge of the truth, and to carry on a work of illumination, conviction, and conversion, to the saving of the soul. Would any Christian show that he is of a truly catholic disposition, let him discover a greater attachment to those even of different denominations, who seem to bear the image of God, than to profane persons, be their apparent or pretended principles what they will. Let us pay some regard to other distinctions, but still the greatest regard to the most important of all distinctions, that of saints and sinners.

4. As this great distinction divides the whole human race, and is so very important in its consequences,

let me earnestly entreat every one who peruseth this treatise, to bring the matter to a trial with regard to himself. Answer this question in seriousness, Whether do you belong to the one class or the other? We are dropping into the grave from day to day, and our state is fixed beyond any possibility of change? What astonishing folly to continue in uncertainty whether we shall go to heaven or hell, whether we shall be companions of angels or associates with blaspheming devils to all eternity? Nothing, therefore, can be more salutary, than that you make an impartial search into your present character and state. If you have ground to conclude that you are at peace with God, what an unspeakable source of joy and consolation! If otherwise, there is no time to lose in hastening from the brink of the pit. May I not with some confidence make this demand of every reader, that he would set apart some time, and apply with vigour and earnestness to the duty of self-examination? Is not this demand reasonable? What injury can you suffer by complying with it? Will conscience permit any to continue unreproved in the neglect of it? Have you read so much on the subject of regeneration, and are you unwilling to reap the benefit of it? Let every one, without exception, take up or renew this grand inquiry, 'Am I in Christ? that is, Am I a new creature or not? Am I a child of God? or do I still continue an heir of hell?"

5. As it is more than probable there will be some readers who are, or have reason to suspect themselves unrenewed, I would now come as an ambassador from Christ, and endeavour to negotiate peace. Wherefore, "as though God did beseech you by

me, I pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled unto God." While I attempt this, I desire to do it under a just impression of the great and principal truths which have been illustrated on this subject. I know that this change is a work of the Holy Spirit of grace: that he only can bring a clean thing out of an unclean; that without his effectual blessing, the clearest and most conclusive reasoning directed to the understanding, the most warm and pathetic application to the affections, will be altogether fruitless. I know that great natural abilities are often perverted and abused; that the soundest reasons in worldly things, and the most brutish folly in matters of eternity, are often joined together; that men may be learned scholars, eminent politicians, active merchants, skilful tradesmen, and yet blinded sinners, whom no instruction can enlighten, whom no warning can alarm. But I know and believe, at the same time, that God, "whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son," is able to make "his word quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." There is an express appointment that the wicked shall "receive warning," and in this way alone the watchman can "deliver his own soul." It is also agreeable to reflect, that when God giveth "a door of utterance," he is also often pleased to give "a door of faith," which I pray may be the case with many who read this discourse, for Christ's sake.

Let me therefore repeat in your ears this truth, and may God Almighty by his Spirit carry it to

your hearts, that "except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Every child of Adam, by nature, is at enmity with God, and must either be renewed in the Spirit of his mind, or perish eternally. It is of no consequence what you are as to outward station, if you are not reconciled to God; it is of no consequence what you are as to outward profession, if you are not inwardly changed. God is no respecter of persons, and, therefore, whether you are high or low, rich or poor; whether you are of one denomination of Christians or another, if you have not been the subjects of a renewing and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, you are children of wrath, and, if you die in that condition, must "go away into everlasting punishment." To reflect seriously but for a few moments on this truth, and that every one of us is so deeply concerned in it, one would think might be sufficient to alarm us all, either for ourselves or for others, or for both. Who could imagine that this weak flesh, so frail in its nature, and so easily taken to pieces, should yet so harden us against the impression of approaching eternity! But is there any hope of relief? Yes there is, and that as universal as the danger. The commission is unlimited: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."

In order to make this exhortation the more distinct and effectual, I shall endeavour to address it in a particular and separate manner to the following classes: the rich and the poor; the young and the old; the self-righteous, and the chief of sinners.

I would preach the everlasting gospel to the rich and affluent, on whom (as the world chooses to ex-

press it) fortune smiles, who are well and plentifully supplied with every present conveniency. The prophet Jeremiah, in trying the success of his message, says, "I will get me unto the great men, and will speak unto them." It is indeed a matter of no small difficulty often to persuade such to hear the truths of the gospel. Let them not be offended while I mention the words of our blessed Saviour: "Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." When the world is pleasing and inviting, it is ready to engross our attention, to possess our esteem, and to attract our homage. Worldly grandeur is very ready to inspire the mind with pride and self-sufficiency, which is, of all other things, the most destructive of real religion, and which is particularly opposite to the humbling and self-abasing doctrine of salvation by grace. The great and fashionable world is still in danger of the offence of the cross. Denying themselves, bearing profane scorn, mortifying the flesh, loving and following a crucified Master, are hard lessons indeed to men of wealth and affluence.

But suffer me to warn all such, not to "trust in uncertain riches." Place not your happiness in so unstable a possession. How strong, as well as how just the wise man's expressions! "Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven." Behold I preach the gospel to you, and offer you the true riches. However

pride may make you fondly flatter yourselves, however your greatness or wealth may deter others from treating you with plainness and sincerity, you are sinners of the race of Adam, you are lost in him by nature, you are transgressors in practice, and liable to divine wrath, from which there is no shelter but in the blood of Christ. It is but a very little time that your worldly greatness can endure. Death shall write vanity on all created glory; and nothing else shall screen you from the wrath of the almighty Judge in the last and great day. There the rich and the poor, the prisoner and the oppressor, shall stand upon a level before the Maker of them all. Embrace, then, while you may, the mercy of God. Put on the spotless robe of your Redeemer's righteousness, and value it more than purple and fine linen, or the most costly attire. Seek the bread of life which came down from heaven, and value it more highly than the most sumptuous and delicate fare. Be not ashamed of a crucified Saviour. Endure with a noble firmness the disdainful smiles of a scoffing world. O how amiable is the union of high station and piety, honour and humility, wealth and self-denial, with a resolute profession of the gospel! Blessed is the memory of Joseph of Arimathea, an honourable man and a counsellor, who boldly begged, and honourably interred the body of our Lord, after it had been crucified at the instigation of corrupt priests, and pierced by the inhumanity of brutal soldiers. May the Lord God of nature bless and increase your substance, and make every thing you do to prosper, but in his mercy deliver you from despising the gospel, dying impenitent, and lifting up your eyes in torments!

2. Let me preach this gospel to the poor. It was the glory of the gospel that it was preached to the poor, and given by our Saviour himself as one of the marks of the Messiah's arrival, that "the gospel was preached to the poor." Very suitable was this to their state, good news were brought to them in their distress. But think not, my brethren, that your being poor is enough of itself. It may, indeed, preserve you from many temptations to which the rich are exposed, and it ought, one would think, to constrain you to seek to be rich towards God. But, alas, this is not always the case! and when it is otherwise, how does it make every considerate heart bleed with compassion and tenderness! O unhappy they who are both poor and profane, miserable in time and miserable to eternity, despised on earth, and outcasts for ever! Pitiable case indeed!

But does not the Saviour of sinners beseech you to be reconciled unto God? He entreats you to come unto him that you may have life. He regardeth not the persons of men, but values a precious immortal spirit as much in a mean cottage as in a splendid palace. Your rags and nakedness can be no hinderance to your obtaining his favour. He counsels you "to buy of him gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich; and white raiment that you may be clothed." But O consider that you are naturally much more loathsome by sin than by poverty. Humble yourselves deeply in the sight of God. Fly for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before you. Accept of a free pardon of all your sins through the blood of Christ, and of his Holy Spirit to enable you to love and serve him. Rejoice in your portion

as all-sufficient and full, and in the covenant of peace, as "ordained in all things and sure." Go in the spirit of adoption to your reconciled Father in Christ, and ask of him your daily bread. Do not envy the prosperity of others, since it is not material whether you shall live in plenty and sleep on a bed of down, or live in straits and lie on a dunghill, compared to what shall become of you for ever. But, above all, be not so mad as to envy sinners an unsanctified prosperity. Rather, when you see a man of opulence despising the Sabbath, or hear a wretch in a gilded chariot profaning his Creator's name, be ready to say, 'Shall I complain of poverty, when my Lord and Master had not where to lay his head. No; let me, on the contrary, bless that adversity which caused me to consider. Let me be very thankful for that humble station which gives me access to communion with God, and does not waste my time with crowds of company. Who knoweth whether I should have retained my integrity, if I had been constantly surrounded with profane gaiety, swimming in pleasure, besieged by flatterers, solicited by sensualists, beset with temptations? O that I may be possessed of the pearl of great price, reconciled to God, united to Christ, adorned with divine grace, and that I may be my Redeemer's at his second coming!'

3. I would preach the gospel to those who are but yet in the morning of life. This is the most pleasant and hopeful part of a minister's work. Happy are you, my dear children, who have been so early called into God's vineyard, but infinitely more happy, if you are inwardly and fully determined to comply with the call. I beseech you "Remember

your Creator in the days of your youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when you shall say you have no pleasure in them." Early piety is exceeding lovely in the eyes of the sober part of mankind, highly acceptable to God, and will be infinitely profitable to yourselves. Be not enticed with the deceitful promises and false pretences of worldly enjoyments, which are so ready to inflame your passions, and so warmly solicit your love. Believe the testimony of all, without exception, who have gone before you, and have left this record, written on created comforts, that they are "vanity and vexation of spirit." Believe it, you have entered on a world of sin and sorrow. You may feel the early stirrings of corruption in yourselves, and see its manifest and manifold fruits both in yourselves and others. Alas! are there not some young persons who learn, as their first language, to blaspheme their Maker's name? Many children who cannot work, are expert in sinning. Alas! your hearts are naturally far from God. You "go astray as soon as you are born, speaking lies."

Be persuaded, therefore, to fly to the blood of Christ, the precious blood of Christ, "who loved you, and gave himself for you." He died upon the cross to save you from the hell which you have deserved by your sins: and he graciously invites you, saying, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God." Blessed are those children who, like their Saviour, advance in wisdom as in stature, and "in favour with God and man." Let young persons in general remember, as they are growing up, that all

the early opportunities of instruction which they have enjoyed, especially such as have been brought up under the inspection of pious parents, will greatly aggravate their guilt, if they continue to despise them. For this reason some, I wish I could not say many, are old in sin when they are but young in years. Wherefore, without further delay, betake yourselves to God in Christ; learn and love your Redeemer's name: and let the life that you live in the flesh be a life of faith on the Son of God and only Saviour of the world. Your early entrance on a religious life will make you regular, established, useful, fruitful Christians. If you are to continue long in the world, it will greatly contribute to the sweetness and serenity of life; and if it be the will of God that you should die soon, it will make you meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. There is something very terrible in the death (often the unexpected death) of young persons, in the bloom or middle of life, plunged in sensuality, inflamed with lust, and bent on sin of every kind. But, blessed be God, there are also some agreeable instances of young saints quickly ripened by divine grace, thoroughly mellowed by early affliction, resigning the world, not with submission only, but pleasure, and taking wing to a land of rest and peace, where "the inhabitants shall not say, I am sick;" and "the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity."

4. I must now preach the gospel to those who are old, who, having gone through many vicissitudes, are perhaps tottering upon the brink of the grave, and drawing near to "the house appointed for all living." And I do it because my office obliges me

to preach the gospel to every creature. There is but little pleasure in addressing such, because there is but little hope of success. May I not suppose that some one, or more, may be led to peruse this discourse, who have many years resisted the calls of the gospel, and have been long accustomed to do evil? What cause have you to admire the mercy of God, that you are not now "in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone for evermore?" Have you not followed many of your equals in age to the church-yard, and committed their bodies to the dust? What preparation have you made, in consequence of the reprieve allowed you, and the admonitions given you? Hear then once more the joyful sound. Believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may have life through his name. Fly to his blood, that you may obtain the forgiveness of your sins, and an inheritance among them who are sanctified. He, and none else, is able to deliver you. Cry to him, that he may breathe upon the dry bones, and they shall live. Though you are hardened in profanity, though you are besotted in sensuality, though earthly mindedness has overspread you like a leprosy, his right hand and his holy arm will get him the victory. He is able to create you anew unto good works; and, as you are already monuments of his patience and forbearance, to make you to eternity the happy monuments of his sovereign and almighty grace. Is there now any remaining objection? Is there yet any room for farther delay? Hath not time shed its hoary hairs upon your heads, and drawn its furrows upon your brows? Make haste, then, and fly for your lives, lest you lie down in sorrow, and make your bed in hell.

5. Let me preach the gospel to the self-righteous. By the self-righteous, I mean those who trust in an outward, lifeless form of duties, in a character formed upon worldly prudence, and a few of the most common offices of civility between man and man; especially those, if any such have persisted in reading this discourse to the close, who despise the doctrines of the grace of God. Do any of you lean to the fashionable scheme of irreligious, pretended morality; and, when you are at liberty, treat the doctrine of free grace, and of Christ's righteousness and merit, with contempt and scorn. As the full soul loatheth the honey-comb, so the self-righteous soul spurns at the riches of divine mercy, and likes not the incessant repetition of the name of Christ. Your guilt is of the darkest and deepest dye. Your danger it is impossible to conceive or express. What views have you in drawing near to a holy God in solemn worship? or what meeting do you expect with God, when he sitteth upon the throne of his holiness in the day of judgment? Do you ever, though in the slightest manner, make conscience of the duty of self-examination? May I not have some hold of you by that quarter? What satisfaction have you in your own hearts? Dare you tell us now what passes there? O the power of self-deceit! You would be covered with confusion, did but the world know the foul pollution that lodges within you; how much less shall you be able to stand the strict and impartial judgment of the great Searcher of hearts?

Do but open the book of God, and what page will not condemn you? This sentence stands uncancelled against you, "Cursed is every one that

continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them.—Out of your own mouths will you be judged, ye wicked servants.—Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?" Bring forth your boasted morality, and let it be put to the trial. Will you, or dare you say, "I have loved the Lord with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my mind, and with all my strength?" Will you say, 'I have loved his worship, and served him in public, in my family, and in secret, and I hope he will accept of it?' I think I am authorized to answer in his name, 'Was it worshipping me to be singing psalms with your mouths, and not once remembering their meaning? to be thinking of a hundred vain things when you were in the house of God? to be praising without thankfulness, confessing without sorrow, and asking blessings without desiring them? and to be more attentive to the faces and dresses of others around you, than to the frame of your own hearts? Was it hearing my word, to be criticising the style and manner of the speaker, and laying hold, with the utmost eagerness, of every improper motion or ill-chosen expression, as a fund of entertainment for yourselves and your companions over your cups and bowls? Or do you call your careless, hasty, drowsy prayers, with long intermissions, worshipping me in secret?"

But, perhaps, you will rather choose to trust to the duties of the second table, and what you owe to your neighbour. Perhaps you will say, I have been honest in all my dealings, and never wronged any man; nay, I have been kind and charitable, have dealt my bread to the hungry, and supplied the wants of

the afflicted and poor. I answer, in the name of God, ' Many have been your defects even in these duties; but supposing it to be so, you have not feared me. It might be from pride, from fear of censure, from prudence; but it was not in obedience to me, for I was not in all your thoughts. Was it your duty to your neighbour to make a mock at his sins, to lead him into intemperance, to despise him in your hearts, and ridicule him in your conversation?' In one word, Do but examine all your righteousnesses, they will " be found as filthy rags before God." Trust not in such a " refuge of lies." The bed is shorter than " that a man can stretch himself on it, and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it." Believe it, there is no salvation in any other than in Christ. His atoning blood will reconcile you to God; his grace and love will captivate your souls; his holy and blessed Spirit will write his laws in your hearts. Believe in him, and you will be more holy than ever, and yet stand astonished at your profane and blind pride and vanity. He will create in you a clean heart, and you will then blush at the thoughts of your remaining pollution. You will apply yourselves to his service with zeal and diligence, and yet still say you are unprofitable servants. One view of the cross of Christ will make sin more odious than a thousand fine descriptions of the beauty of virtue, which commonly serve only to nourish and fortify the pride of man. If ever you desire to see the face of God in mercy, or to dwell in his presence, believe in Christ, for there is no other way to the Father.

6. In the last place, suffer me to preach the gospel to the chief of sinners. It is the glory of our

Redeemer, that he "saves to the uttermost all that come to God by him." The dignity of his person, the greatness of his sufferings, and the infinite value of his atonement founded on both, makes him "mighty to save." Let such sinners attend to this who are without excuse, whose hearts have been a sink of the greatest impurity, whose lives are stained with the foulest and grossest crimes, whose sins have been numerous, and heinous, and scandalous; who have no plea to offer, but are sensible that they have justly merited the wrath of God in its utmost rigour. Let such attend to this as are trembling at the thoughts of a righteous judgment, and saying, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.—Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Behold I bring you good tidings of mercy unmerited, pardon unsolicited, a full and free remission of all your sins: "I have blotted out thine iniquities as a cloud, and as a thick cloud thy sins: return unto me, for I have redeemed thee." Receive this testimony, and "set to your seal that God is true."

Think not to do injury to the grace of God, by weaving a self-righteous cobweb, and refusing to believe till you have laid down some rules of a new life, and effected some partial reformation, as if you would first save yourselves, that you may be fit for salvation by Christ. These hopes will soon be dashed in pieces. Faith in the imputed righteousness of Christ, is the sinner's only plea. The more vile you are in your own apprehension, the more need you have "to put on Christ." The subsequent change of heart and practice must be the effect of his power, is a part of his purchase, and ought

to be received as his gracious gift. And I will venture to foretell, that you will make the greater progress in true holiness, the less you are disposed to boast of or to trust in it.

This I apprehend, is the gospel itself, styled in Scripture, with the highest propriety, the "gospel of the grace of God." "Christ came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." If you will rely on him for salvation, he will shed abroad the love of God in your hearts by the Holy Ghost, which will be a powerful and operative principle of new obedience. I beseech you, therefore, in the most earnest manner, not to reject the counsel of God against yourselves. Nothing can be more liberal, or more gracious than the offer of the gospel: "I will give to him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely." There is no sin of so deep a dye, or so infectious a stain, but the blood of Christ is sufficient to wash it out. There is not any slave of Satan so loaded with chains, but he is able to set him free. If you perish, it is of yourselves. I have given you warning, from a sincere and ardent concern for your everlasting interest; and may God himself, for Christ's sake, by his Holy Spirit, effectually persuade you to comply with it.

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